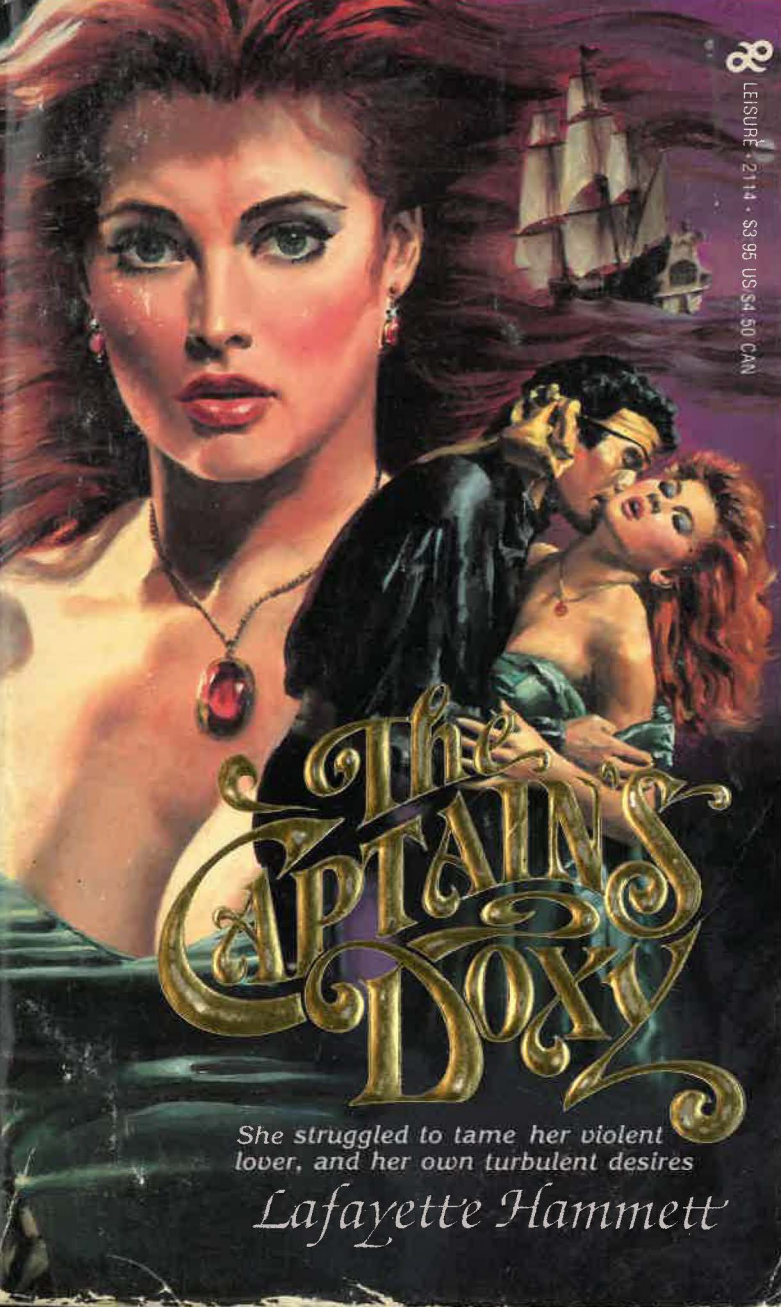




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The background of the cover is a dramatic illustration. In the foreground, a woman with long, flowing red hair and blue eyes looks directly at the viewer. She has a serious expression and is wearing a necklace with a large, oval, reddish-brown pendant. In the background, a man in a dark, period-style coat is embracing a woman with red hair. They appear to be on a ship, as a large sailing vessel with multiple masts is visible in the distance on a dark, stormy sea under a purple and red sky.

The Captain's Doxy

*She struggled to tame her violent
lover, and her own turbulent desires*

Lafayette Hammett



Degraded by Lust ...

Homeless, friendless, and pursued by the law for stabbing a lecherous nobleman in defense of her honor, lovely Katy Coswell was abducted aboard the pirate ship Hawk, where she was forced to share the bed of cruel and relentless James Bartlett, captain of the buccaneers.

...Exalted by Passion

At first overcome by shame and revulsion at the lusty captain's amorous advances, Katy soon found herself responding with equal ardor, as his caresses aroused her to a frenzy of desire. Now her only fear was that Jamie would never return her love!



ISBN 0-8439-2114-5

Learning to Love

"Are you still frightened of me, Katy?" he asked softly, his large hands tightening on her shoulders.

She bit at her lower lip nervously and nodded.

"You mustn't be afraid of me, Katy. I have no desire to hurt you. A woman like you was made to be loved."

"Loved! By you?" She jerked away from him. "I fear you, m'lord, for you are a man of many moods that I can not understand. I fear you, because you dominate everyone and everything around you. Even when you are not here, I feel you watching me, and I am afraid, for I feel that I must please you."

"You wish to please me? Then just be yourself, do not even try to be anything else except your own sweet innocent self." Yet even as he spoke, she could see desire rising in his eyes, belying his solemn words. His mouth descended on hers. She tried to push him away.

"No," she gasped. "Not again," she cried angrily.

The CAPTAIN'S DOXY

Lafayette Hammett

LEISURE BOOKS  NEW YORK CITY



A LEISURE BOOK

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Part One
ENGLAND

Chapter 1

The rain had fallen quietly all night lulling Katy into a peaceful slumber with its soft, gentle patter. A sudden flash of light illuminated the small room in which she slept and a rolling cannonade of thunder frightened the girl awake. With a cry of dismay, she pulled the quilt up against her chin and held it there with trembling hands. Another great flash of light and a loud echoing grumble and Katy relaxed, recognizing the bombastic threats of Old Man Winter in a last attempt at bravado on the eve of his demise.

She settled down into the warmth once more, listening to the steady tattoo of the rain against the window panes. The monotonous plop-plop dripping from the red tiled roof soothed her into lethargy.

The wind blew with a lonely, forlorn sigh through the large, black spruce trees which surrounded three sides of the ancient mansion, rattling the window panes threateningly when it gusted, creeping away to sigh in the trees sulkily. The night hush was shattered abruptly as a shutter banged.

Silence followed, only to be broken again by another loud bang. Someone cursed and secured the shutter. From down the hall a little squeal sounded from Sarah, the chamber-maid, and a male voice complained, "Move over, so I kin git back in and git warm."

Sarah squealed again, "William, y'air all wet."

He muttered something and Sarah giggled. Silence returned except for the normal sounds of the tired, old mansion.

Katy lay quietly, savouring this early morning hour. It was the only time she had to herself except in the evening just before bedtime. All other waking hours belonged to someone else. As it was not yet daylight, the chores didn't begin for another hour or so. She listened to the eerie murmurs of the medieval mansion as the cold, gusty wind crept around it. The halls creaked mournfully as the chilly breath blew down the long corridors. Katy felt rather than heard the silent protests of the ancient house.

She shook the mood away angrily, "Stop it, you silly goose. One would think you believed in ghosts and such nonsense."

Rising and lighting a candle, she made her bed. Shivering from the chill in the air she crossed her arms across her breasts and stood for a moment admiring her new quilt. Rarely receiving anything new, this beautiful coverlet held a dear and special meaning for her. Sarah had helped her finish it only last week. The neat, even stitches brought out the designs of the flowers and leaves. The bright scraps of material everyone had donated for the lovely quilt gave her usually drab room a bright, cheery air and awakened in Katy a warm feeling for those who had shown her kindness.

She stepped into her shift and pulled it on, hating the rough feel of the cloth against her tender skin. She struggled, pulling the tight straps over her shoulders and the mended bodice upward to cover her nakedness, later she would tighten the laces. Going to the window she looked out through the raindrops which ran down the crystal panes like

silent tears. This was her dreamtime; the time she allowed herself to dream of what might have been. When she was younger she had pretended she was a princess and had hundreds of servants to wait upon her and to love her. As she grew older her dream had changed. Now she imagined herself a young lady with beautiful clothes and a handsome young man madly in love with her. She would flirt with him outrageously until he could contain himself no longer and cast himself at her feet declaring his undying love for her. Swearing he could no longer live without her, he would beg her on bended knee to marry him. Looking at him with disdain through her haughty emerald-green eyes, she would tell him that his honourable pledge of love would receive considerable thought, for there were so many to reflect upon.

Her reverie was broken as a carriage pulled into the long oak lined drive. Even in the false dawn illumination she could see the light rain continuing to fall. The lamp on the side of the carriage bobbed up and down from the motion of the phaeton. It stopped for a few seconds then moved forward again. Once more the carriage stopped and someone got out. Another jagged thunderbolt split the heavens and the master of the house was outlined in the fulminating brightness.

"Lord Percy. Drunk again, I suppose." She clicked her tongue against her teeth. "Wonder why he got out there instead of the front door? Oh well..." Katy immediately dismissed him from her mind.

Her thought turned to the chores ahead. Everyone would be cleaning muddy footprints and dripping puddles today, left behind by Lord Percy and Lady Elizabeth Carstair's many visitors. The couple had recently returned from London and had been received in court by King Charles II. It seemed as if everyone for miles around flocked to the house to hear all the gossip they had brought back with them. The Carstairs and many of their friends were now imitating some of the habits of the court and the one which irritated the staff of servants the most was the change in schedule. Lady

Carstairs refused to rise until noon and the staff was in an uproar trying to arrange a new timetable.

"It must be nice to lie abed half the day and have nothing to do; I would like to try it just once," she murmured.

Puttering about the room Katy tried to imagine a life blessed with the luxuries of the Carstairs. With a dreamy faraway look in her eyes she picked up the heavy brush and began to pull it through the tangled copper-hued locks. A snarl jerked her back to the drab room and the cracked, chipped mirror mocking her. It was getting to be more of a chore than a pleasure to comb the heavy tresses, as she could now sit on the fiery mane. She had thought to cut it, but her friends had disapproved so vociferously she finally rejected the idea. Sitting on the stool, she cocked her head to one side as she brushed admiring the the flaming, crowning beauty. 'Pride goeth before a fall,' she reminded herself. With a critical eye she studied her serious face in the blemished mirror. Large green eyes stared back at her. The oval face framed by the luxuriant mass of wavy red hair was the color of new cream; two small dimples lay hidden at the corners of her mouth, only peeking out when coaxed by a smile; her lower lip had a pouty look to it and made her look younger than her sixteen years. Slanting brows and thick, dark lashes drew people's attention to her seductive eyes. She frowned at the image for she had never thought of herself as pretty because of her odd-looking eyes. Resentment showed on her face as she tightened the laces of the bodice of her shift; her firm, full breasts were now tightly laced in the confines of the too small bodice. Why should women always be dissatisfied with their bosoms, she wondered? Colleen had always been envious of Katy's voluptuousness and wore ruffles and laces to disguise her insufficiency. Colleen appeared to be almost straight up and down, while Katy continued to grow rounder and firmer in the most embarrassing places. She was having a hard time trying to remake her old clothes to hide her blossoming bosom and rounding bottom.

Katy took up her brushing once more. A noise broke the

silence in the hall startling her and she stood up, listening. All was quiet once more. Shrugging she lifted the ends of her hair to comb out the tangles. "I should have braided it last night," she thought.

The door opened quickly behind her and someone entered. Looking over her shoulder, Katy was startled to see Lord Percy. He was breathing heavily and closed the door by leaning on it. His dark blue velvet doublet was wet from the rain and was stretched tightly over his ponderous stomach. The periwig sat askew on his balding head, looking like a wet powderpuff. The matching breeches were mud splattered as were his usually highly polished knee-high boots. He seemed to glare at her out of red-rimmed and glassy eyes.

Katy was more curious than anything else, for as far as she knew he never came to this wing of the house. She had not seen him for several months, as she waited only upon his wife, since they shared separate apartments now.

"Yes, M'Lord?"

"Katy? Is it you?" he asked in a deep, whiskey thickened voice.

"Aye, M'Lord."

"Ye gods, I thought ye were still a child. But, nay, ye be the same age as my Colleen and she's to be married in a month."

His eyes traveled up and down her body and they glinted with a strange light. He moved closer. "I was returning in my carriage and saw you standing at your window. God, what made me still think of you as a child? Look at the size of those tits!" He whispered hoarsely staring at her partially revealed bosom. Katy looked down with flaming face and crossed her arms over her chest.

"No, don't be ashamed! Don't cover yourself! Nothing should hide those charms." He reached out with a pudgy hand and grabbed the front of her bodice and pulled. There was a sound of rending cloth and Katy was horrified to see her bodice ripped to the waist. Her round, firm breasts spilled out over top of the torn garment like new bread running over in the rising. Wide green eyes stared in terror at

the lust revealed in his Lordship's eyes. Licking his lips in anticipation, he moved toward her slowly.

"Please, no, M'Lord," she begged backing up.

"Ah, Katy, me girl, don't be afraid. I shall not be denied. Don't fight me, lass, 'twill do ye no good." Then one long stride and he was upon her, one hand behind her head holding her by the hair and the other on her breast. His slobbering lips were everywhere and each place they touched felt moistly defiled. His breath was warm upon her face and reeked of whiskey. Katy whimpered as she tried to push him away. Using his weight he pushed her toward the bed, kissing her relentlessly.

"Oh, my God! No, M'Lord, please!" She wailed. "I've never been with a man before."

"Then come, my love, and let me initiate you. Let me show you the delights of love," he croaked hoarsely.

She struggled and clawed at him, but to no avail. His strength was greater than she had ever imagined and her breath whistled from the futile exertion. She knew if he had not been sodden with drink the struggle would have been long over. He bumped her against the dresser; her hand searched frantically and finally closed around something cold and solid.

With fascinated horror she watched her hand descend against his chest. Lord Percy's eyes opened widely in astonishment, he winced in pain. Something warm spurted against the terror-stricken girl's cheek. Lord Percy grabbed her arm as he sank to the floor. Katy's name escaped his lips in a long hissing sound which followed his descent. Katy stared aghast, her teeth clamped down on her fist and she fought the impulse to scream. The blood oozed out around the scissors, staining to crimson everything it touched.

Katy had no idea how long she stood watching the horrifying scene, but she realised at last she had to get out of the house. Stepping across the body, she looked down at the now silent Lord and shuddered. Catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror was like looking at a stranger. Her face

was chalk-white and splattered with blood, as were her neck, chest and hair.

She closed her eyes tightly and sealed off the scream building at the back of her throat. "Think, think!" she demanded wildly, and made herself plan what she must do. Then with strong determination she picked up the ewer, and with shaking hands poured the water into the basin and bathed. She washed her hands several times imagining there was still blood on them. Stepping out of her torn garment, she donned a fresh shift, then deliberately set about collecting her meager possessions. She pulled on heavy woolen socks, and the boots Colleen had given her last year; after her petticoat, a heavy woolen skirt and her warmest blouse, lastly her cloak. She knew she would need extra money, the few pence she had would be as nothing. Forcing herself to kneel beside the body, she went through the dead man's pockets. Apparently he had been gambling, as usual, for all he had left was a few coins. She knelt there for a few seconds. "I'm so sorry, M'Lord. Oh, God, I'm sorry," she wept.

Wearily she pushed herself up and pulled her hood forward. Tears were running down her cheeks but she brushed them away in sudden anger, remembering his abuse of her.

She dropped the stolen coins into her cloak pocket and picked up her bundle of possessions. Opening the door, she looked out. The hallway was empty. Closing the door behind her, she walked quickly down the semi-darkened hallway. The back stairs held no light, but she knew every squeak and loose board. As she crept along close to the wall, missing the fourth step, there was very little noise except from the kitchen where Mary, the cook, was starting the morning fire in the stove. Katy had not realised that she was holding her breath until she reached the back door and found the need to exhale deeply. Stepping outside, she closed the portal quietly, then ran across the coach road and disappeared into the safety of the trees. The window to her room was empty,

as if the occupant was still sleeping. Taking one last sorrowful look at the home she had known for so long, she turned and hurried down the lane.

The rain had slackened to a mist. The wind barely moved the barren branches, and the air was chilled by the dampness, the mud sucked and dragged at her feet. She was surprised to see a few other people on the road this early hour going in her direction. Katy mingled with them and soon found herself walking beside a young girl about her own age. After some moments of girlish chatter, Katy learned the girl's name was Charity Sharp and that she worked as a seamstress for a Mistress Kettle in the seaport of Blyth. Charity's mother had taken ill and Mistress Kettle had given her money and leave to go home. She had buried 'the poor dear' a few days before and was returning to Blyth.

Katy told Charity that she was running away from her employer's advances.

"Would ye be lookin' fer work, dove?"

"Oh, yes."

"Can ye sew a fair seam?"

"I'm told I am very good with needle and thread."

"It's settled then, it's shore I am that Mistress Kettle will hire ye. She was lookin' fer another sempstress before I left. She has a good and tender heart and when I tell 'er yer misfortune I know she will be a takin' ye in."

"Oh, Charity, do you really think so?"

Charity gave a definite nod. She eyed the girl critically, noting to herself that in this instance Katy's astounding beauty might prove to be more of a hindrance than an asset.

As they traveled Katy found herself telling Charity about her insipid existence. "I was a foundling, left on the doorstep of Pastor Coswell and his good wife. They never had any children of their own, so they named me Katherine and gave me their surname. They were so good to me and I grew to love them as if they were my own parents. When I was six Mrs. Coswell died and I went to live with Lord Percy and

Lady Elizabeth Carstair as a companion to their daughter. Colleen and I were like sisters and I was treated like one of the family . . . at least by Colleen. She had a tutor who taught both of us. That is where I received my education. I have tried to keep up on it a little by reading when I get a chance. I sneaked books out of Lord Percy's library at night."

"Ye can read?" Charity asked in awe.

"Aye and write," Katy smiled at her friend, then continued. "When we reached the age of twelve Colleen was sent to a private school for genteel ladies. I thought my life had ended for we were very close. Lady and Lord Carstair talked of sending me to an orphanage or work house, would to God they had." She forced the tears back.

"Now, now, my dove, ye must try t' forgit."

"But how? It was so horrible, that old man pawing . . ."

"After all, he was forcin' himself on ye. Even servants should have some rights. Go on, dearie," she urged softly.

After a slight pause Katy continued. "They decided to train me instead. After telling me of my proper place in life, Lady Elizabeth turned me over to Sarah Covy, her maid, so I too could learn to serve someone of Lady Elizabeth's station. That's where I learned to sew so well, Sarah is truly an artist with needle and thread."

"And that's how ye lurned the King's English and yer polished manners. Good, they will serve ye well, of that ye may be shore. Ye said ye have no idea of yer parents?"

"No, only a locket with pictures inside. It was around my neck when Pastor Coswell found me; he said I should never lose it as it could one day help me find my parents, the good Lord willing."

They traveled all day in the damp and drizzle. The rain would cease and after a while commence again. Katy knew that except for Charity's cheerfulness and patience she would have been frightened and forlorn, instead of only wet and cold. Early in the afternoon the two weary girls stopped and shared Charity's meager lunch. As the day aged into

evening, Charity became very quiet.

"Charity, what is the matter? Are you ill?" Katy asked in alarm.

"Nay, only worried."

"About what?"

"Night is comin' on and we have nowhere t' go."

"Isn't there an inn somewhere close?"

"Aye. About two or three miles down the road."

"Well, we'll just have to go there."

"'Tis the Black Angus. I know Max Stern. I always stay there everytime I go home, but he'll be madder'n hops if I show up there so soon and with a friend, no less. Ye see, I owe him money from the last time." She gave a whimsical smile, "He has a good heart, but I—well, I sorta overtax it."

"Would this help?" Katy took Lord Percy's and her own coins from the cloak pocket and held them out to her worried friend.

Charity's glum face brightened and she laughed gleefully, "Katy, ye air an angel. We be rich."

"Here, you take them. I know naught of bartering with innsmen and such."

"That be one of me better talents." On impulse, Charity kissed her newly discovered friend on the cheek.

The sudden show of affection had a profound impact upon Katy, for no one had shown her any token of affection except Colleen and that had ceased in childhood when she was shown her "proper station in society." Tears commenced to run down her cheeks and Charity held her weeping companion as one holds a small child, soothing and comforting her with pats and whispers until she was calm.

Soon they trudged on; both girls were very tired from fighting the inclement elements. A short while later the inn was spotted from the top of a knoll and fatigue fled at the thoughts of a warm fire and savory food and a soft bed. Stumbling and laughing the girls ran to the door. From within came the sounds of laughter and music. Charity entered boldly, Katy followed shyly.

"Ah, ladies, may I be of service to ye?" The tavern-keeper approached, smiling broadly and rubbing his plump hands together, until he recognized Charity. Then he frowned.

"Max, 'tis good t' see ye again."

"And what kin I be doin' fer ye, Charity Sharp?"

"A place t' rest and eat."

"Food there be plenty of. Rooms be all taken. What with the foul weather, the inn be full."

"Max, shorely fer an old friend ye could be findin' somewheres we could be layin' our weary heads. We have traveled the full day and be tired and sore in need of a warm bed and a warmer fire t' be dryin' our clothes. Come, Max ..."

With a coaxing voice and firm hand, she maneuvered him toward the warm, glowing fire, talking as she went. Katy followed the arguing two into the large banquet room. A long table filled the middle of the room with smaller tables lining two walls. All were full. Shyly, Katy eyed the room; never had she seen so many young men in one place before. They elbowed their companions or nodded their heads in her direction as her sparkling gaze traveled from one pair of enchanted eyes to the next. When wide, appreciative smiles and bold looks met her retiring gaze, confusion overcame her and she turned her full attention to the evening repast to hide her timidity. The long table was laden with roast beef, potatoes, steaming vegetables and creamy gravies. Tankards of ale or goblets of spirits were at every place or filled the hand of each reveller. A few wives sat sedately dining with their husbands. The delicious aroma of food filled the air and Kathy's mouth watered. Until now she hadn't realised how hungry she was.

She turned her attention to Charity and Max. Charity was gesturing wildly with her small, slender hands, the innkeeper was just as convincing. The contrast between the two was an amusing sight. Charity was a little thing, hardly over five feet tall, her short, black hair lay in damp, tight ringlets around her heart-shaped face. A pug nose gave her

an impish look. Dancing brown eyes and freckles did nothing to discourage the impression. Her mouth was framed in gentle laugh lines that revealed small even teeth. Max Stern, on the other hand, was short and squat, with a jolly little belly which he seemed to use as a shelf to rest his pudgy hands. He had a nose which looked like a small tomato just plucked fresh from his garden and hung in the middle of his face. Blue eyes twinkled with boundless good will toward all. To strangers who didn't know him, he looked like an easy touch, but the local people knew him to be a shrewd but honest businessman.

Katy once more surveyed the laughing young men and music-filled room and felt a warmth that seemed to reach out and touch her. As her gaze swept the hall again, she saw several of the young blades watching her with a roguish and appreciative eye. The young man playing the lute sat against the wall on a high stool. Playing a soft, romantic song, he slid off the stool and strode slowly toward her. She smiled shyly. Never having had anyone flirt with her before, Katy was at a loss what to do. She watched him through her lashes; as he drew nearer a strange feeling crept over her and she was surprised to find herself trembling. She moved closer to the fire and Charity.

"Max, Max, I know y' kin find room fer the two of us somewheres. Look at the poor darlin', so cold and wet and tired." The two turned to look at Katy. She blushed and ducked her head on finding she was the object of their conversation.

"Charity, everytime ye visit me ye bring a stray with ye, one that's always cold, tired and wet 'r hungry 'r somethin'. Ye're worsen'n my daughter, Meg. She that likes strays as bad as ye."

"Meg! Of course, why didn't we think o' her before? We could be sleepin' on the floor in her room. Anywheres, Max," she pleaded, then craftily jingled the money in her pocket. "Remember, Max, we kin pay."

He shook his head hopelessly, then sighed, "And ye kin pay. Let me be findin' Meg."

Charity joined Katy smiling cheerfully. "See, dearie, I told ye Max would help us." She frowned the young troubadour back into his corner.

Soon they found themselves in Meg's room. It was a small cubicle which nestled at the end of the hall; a tiny fireplace cheered the chamber with a warm and cosy flame. Beckoning them invitingly, a large bed with a soft feather mattress awaited their weary bodies. A dresser with a cracked mirror, and two straight back cane chairs, which were now covered with steaming, drying clothes, stood about the room. Clothes seemed to be hanging and dripping everywhere. The two girls sat on a bench in their damp shifts eating roast beef and all the trimmings.

"Oh, Charity, I'm so lucky to have found you. I don't know what I would have done without you."

"Nonsense, dove, ye know ye would have managed."

"Nay, that's not true. I have never been away from the Carstairs' house by myself. I had no friends or relatives to visit, so I was content to stay home. The few times I went anywhere at all was with Sarah or Mary. They were so good to me, almost like a mother and sister, I suppose. But without you I would have been as a sheep among wolves."

Charity pondered this. "Poor child. Yes, I kin see yer right, lass. But never ye mind, I shall look after ye now. I shall speak t' the Mistress and make shore that she takes ye in... as a sempstress."

Katy looked at her friend fondly. "If she doesn't need a seamstress we'll tell her I'll scrub floors or do anything, just so I can be with you."

"No!" Charity said sharply. Then giving Katy a keen glance her voice softened. "What I mean is, we don't want t' be tellin' 'er that. If ye be a good sempstress ye want only that."

"Yes, of course." Puzzled, Katy eyed her disturbed companion for several moments.

Meg finally came in after making sure everything was locked up for the night. She was a cheerful soul, even tired as she was. Rising with the first gay note of the lark, she carried the toil of running the inn and tavern upon her sturdy shoulders. But with the finesse born of woman she skillfully manoeuvred her father into believing the business thrived under his clever auspices.

Meg and Charity laughingly shared past experiences about Charity's encounters with Max. Sentences, one after the other, often began: "Remember when . . . ?" Katy smiled in silence at first, then finally joined in the merriment. Katy envied the warm devotion between Meg and Charity. Watching the older girl Katy pondered Meg's charm. She decided it certainly wasn't her looks for the tavern-maid was nearly as tall as a man, with narrow shoulders and hips. Her hands were large and bony, coarse and red from the endless duties which bound her to the Black Angus. Warm grey eyes rested upon her chambermates, and when she laughed her nose crinkled in delight making her appear comely. Her jolly nature bubbled with warmth and friendliness and Katy found herself succumbing to the spell Meg wove around those she took a liking to.

The three girls sat laughing and talking until sleep forced them to bed. Katy found herself in the middle and though they were cramped she felt something of the companionship she had missed all her life. She had never had the chance for this camaraderie and love she was experiencing with her new friends and looked forward to all the good times she would have with Charity. Weariness and shock ebbing away, she slept.

Chapter 2

Great puffy cottonballs filled the early dawning azure sky as the girls prepared to continue their journey. There was still the small nip of winter in the crisp air, but the beautiful aurora peeping up in the pastel-hued east drove all thoughts of wintry gloom away, giving forth the promise of an early spring.

Eager to be on their way the girls prepared for an early start. Meg had packed them a lunch with the leftover beef, along with a large chunk of cheese, crisp red apples and a bottle of wine. With the sun shining and the birds singing a lilting tune, they bid their friends a joyful farewell. As they walked along laughing and chattering Charity broke into a song:

The silver swan, who living had no note,
When death approached, unlocked her silent throat;
Leaving her breath against the reedy shore,

Thus sung first and last and sung no more.
Farewell, all joys; O death, come close mine eyes;
More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise.

Her soft soprano voice filled the morning air with a sweet mournful note. When she had ended the song she turned to Katy and smiled shyly.

"Charity, that was beautiful."

Embarrassed, Charity skipped ahead and swung the basket she carried in a circle, twirling around several times. Katy slung her bagful of possessions over her shoulder and smiled at the gleeful disposition of her friend. Happiness seemed to radiate from her. She made friends so easily and was so outgoing with everyone, whereas Katy just became quiet and timid. Actually she was afraid of people, having been isolated and never knowing how to speak to anyone. "Oh, to be like Charity and have everyone love me," she thought.

"Did ye ever see such a beautiful day? Oh, 'tis so good t' be alive."

Immediately a picture flashed into Katy's mind of Lord Percy lying at her feet and blood oozing out around the blades of the scissors. She paled and gasped as guilt stabbed her with a piercing blow.

Charity ran back to her. "Katy, what is it, lass? Air ye in pain? Where do ye hurt?"

"No, no, I'm all right," she stammered, but she grew silent and Charity could get only a few words out of her the rest of the morning.

"Do ye want t' stop and eat, dove?"

"No, I'm not hungry." Then added quickly, "We can if you would like something."

"Nay, jist an apple will hold me. Here, ye need t' eat something too." She handed one of the rosy apples to Katy and they continued on their way.

Later, her guilt forgotten Katy asked, "What is Blyth like, Charity?"

"Well, knowin' ye have never been away from home before, ye air in fer a big surprise. Ye know how the homes air in Morpeth? Big and standin' alone surrounded by fields, or small and alone?" Katy nodded. "Well, in Blyth they seem t' grow on top o' each other and side by side; usually the merchants have their shops below. Apartments they call 'em now. The King, may the good Lord bless 'im, brought that word back with 'im from France, so the people air startin' t' use it too." She looked at Katy and smiled broadly, "It's the hustle-bustle I like most of all. Everybody's goin' somewheres and they have t' git there fast. Because it's a seaport, it's busy all the time. The seaman never seem t' sleep and they're out day and night seekin' the pleasures of life."

"It sounds exciting."

"It is and once ye git used to't and stop bein' so timid and shy ye'll enjoy it as I do."

"How long until we get there? I can hardly bear to wait."

"From the looks o' that sky, it's goin' t' be longer than I planned on. Before the rains come again, I think we better be findin' us a place t' bed down fer the night. I don't look forward t' bein' wet and cold tonight."

Katy had been so absorbed in her own thoughts she hadn't noticed that the sun was shrouded in a pearl-grey mantle and that the eastern sky was quickly being covered by large, billowing, angry thunderheads. The girls began walking faster as there were no buildings in sight anywhere. The wind gusted and the air became chilled.

"Oh, Katy, 'tis wet and cold we'll be this night after all, I'm befearsed."

The frigid air whipped their skirts and cloaks around their legs, nearly taking their breath away. The sky steadily darkened even though it was early in the day. The air grew burdened with moisture.

"Charity," Katy grabbed her arm and pointed, "look—over there," she gasped as the wind snatched greedily at her words.

A shabby hovel, barely visable, squatted beneath a small

stand of trees down a short path off the road.

The girls started running toward the shack, as the wind clutched at their garments with icy fingers trying to hold them back. Suddenly, the rain came toward them like a sheet let down from heaven. Panting from the run they approached the hut. The door stood ajar and hung from one leather hinge. Charity picked the edge of the door up as she hurried through, with Katy close on her heels. When both were inside she closed the barrier and leaned against it surveying the room as the rain descended across the thatched roof.

"Any port in a storm, as they say," Charity commented dryly, eyeing the disordered and littered room. A table was lying on its side with three broken legs, the chairs were reduced to shattered rubble. Left over debris from man and animals was strewn across the floor, molding and rotting, souring the air with its putrescence. Two black beady eyes glared at them from the mess. Katy gasped and gripped Charity's hand tightly, shielding herself behind the bolder girl. There came a scurry beneath the moldering mess and the grey furry creature sped across the floor and disappeared into a large hole in the corner. Katy looked at her friend in dismay and shuddered. Charity pushed through a large cobweb; they were hanging everywhere. Dust lay thickly from corner to corner and the rain dripped down the inside of one water stained wall. The bed was a small cot in the corner. A thin dusty straw mattress clung precariously to it. Noxious odours assaulted their nostrils as they grabbed the tattered bedding and shoved it back onto the bedstead.

Charity wrinkled her nose in disgust. "Well, it will jist have t' do. Let's see if we kin move it over there to the other side o' the room so it won't git soppin'." They pushed and tugged until the cot was secured where Charity wanted it.

"There, that will do. Now, let's see if we kin find somethin' t' start a fire with." They looked through the rubble and pushed aside dusty bric-a-brac with distaste. Katy let out a screech of terror when she dislodged another small grey

velvet animal from one of the piles of rubble with her foot. She clung to Charity horror-stricken as the mouse let out a squeal of his own and scurried to safer quarters.

"I can't stand those horrible animals," her voice trembled with loathing. She watched from safer quarters as Charity continued the quest alone until she finally admitted defeat.

"Well, it's going t' be a long, cold night, dearie, but at least we'll be dry." She declared with hands on hips and a frown on her face.

Katy was still quivering within as she helped to lay out the repast. They spread out the small, red and white checkered table covering, which Meg had used to shield the food from the weather, across the small bed. They hadn't eaten, except for the fruit, since breaking their fast that morning and both girls were ravenous.

"Good old Meg, she must've planned on feedin' an army, bless 'er."

The roast beef left over from the night before was moist and succulent, the cheese a rich Cheshire with just a little tang, the wine tart and mellow. To the two hungry young appetites, it was a banquet.

Charity stood up and stretched, then patted her stomach. "If I eat like that very often, I'm goin' to git fat," she laughed.

"It was delicious, wasn't it?" Katy agreed, yawning.

True to Charity's prediction, it did prove to be a long miserable eventide. The rain fell all night and the wind whistled through the trees, causing them to beat against the frail shelter. The icy blast of Boreas' breath invaded each crack and knothole as the north wind howled with discontent throughout the night. The water dripped down the sides of the walls creating a sweating dampness and puddles on the infested floor. The girls slept fitfully. Even though they were wrapped head and heels in their heavy cloaks the chill penetrated deeply into their bones. Their teeth chattered and they shivered violently.

Grumbling to herself through chattering teeth, Charity

stood up. "Katy, I think it would help if we used both cloaks over us and slept against each other to keep warm."

She tugged Katy's cape out from under her and spread both of them over the shivering girl. "Now, turn over on your side." She climbed back into the bed and pulled the mantles over her, putting her arm around Katy's waist, snuggled up against her friend. Katy could feel the firm youthfulness of the trembling body against her back. She felt herself blushing because of the physical contact. She had never lain with anyone before and was unfamiliar with the solace and comfort of another body. Soon the warmth began to pervade their limbs and they were able to sleep.

The morning broke dull and foggy. The girls ate without the healthy appetite of the night before, then started out again. There was still a bitter chill in the air. The road was slippery and mucky with puddles everywhere they stepped. Their boots felt mushy and their feet soon lost all feeling. Snow lay in patches alongside the road and now mixed with the light rain to further torment the travelers.

"How much further, Charity?" Katy asked through chattering teeth.

"About five miles, I think." They turned at a noise behind them. "Katy, look. Maybe we kin git a ride."

A rickety old wagon creaking and moaning with every turn of the wheel was slowly creeping up on them, pulled by a pony horse in even worse condition. An old man with a long white beard that hung on his chest in wet strings was sitting hunched over the reins. A wide-brimmed black hat sagged dejectedly around his face.

"Please, kind sir, stop and give us a ride," Charity implored.

"Yer goin' about as fast as I am," the old man grumbled.

"But we kin hardly walk, our feet air so numb."

"Don't think ole Harry'll be able t' carry all three of us."

Charity and Katy struggled through the mud to keep up with the shivering old man. "We really don't weigh much and we kin pay." Charity held out one of the coins.

The old man's faded blue eyes lit up. "Coin o' the realm," he muttered in awe, "git in, git in, me girls. If ole Harry can't carry ye, I will."

Struggling to the back of the wagon on benumbed feet they climbed in gratefully. Bundles of straw protected the travel worn girls from most of the foul weather.

"Be ye goin' t' Blyth?"

"Aye, clean through."

"Thank the Lord," Charity whispered. "Good, ye kin let us out in the middle o' the city."

They soon warmed up enough to catch up on the sleep they had lost the night before. The wagon chirruped all the way, but the weary two heard nothing. Too soon the old man was roughly shaking his slumbering passengers.

"Girls, girls, we be here, wake up."

Still half asleep they climbed slowly out of the ancient wagon, thanking the man once, twice. He just kept nodding and holding out his hand, saying nothing. Charity grinned at Katy and pressed one of the few remaining coins into the dirty hand. He bit down on the metal and smiled widely; then pulled at his forelock and climbed upon the seat and rumbled away.

Katy stood transfixed where the old man had left her. People hurried by her in every direction. Some of them bravely forded the slushy road, struggling through ankle deep clinging mud. Her pulse quickened with the excitement and apprehension building within her. Charity had moved to the broadwalk and looked back for her friend. A mild look of exasperation crossed her face momentarily as she eyed the quiescent lass. The desire to return to her work and employer was making her uneasy. She was sure that Mistress Kettle would hire her new friend, especially after she saw her. Charity's main concern was the hope of securing the proper job for the young innocent damsel.

Charity waded out into the mud once more and grasped Katy's wrist. Katy allowed herself to be led out of the mire onto the sidewalk; twisting and turning as she walked, she

watched the throng hurrying by. Never had she seen so many people, people of all descriptions. Many of them were sailors, foreign and domestic, each with a roving and leering eye. Trollops dressed in gaily coloured gowns and heavily painted faces smiled invitingly at the tars. The young girl blushed as she saw many of the invitations brazenly accepted. Peasants ambled by, their faces furrowed with lines of fatigue and eyes cavernous with the pain of despair.

Carriages of all sizes rattled and creaked slowly by carrying businessmen to their destinations. The mud sucked and squelched noisily as the horses pranced through the slough. Hiding behind their embellished phaetons and rich velvet or damask curtains to protect them from the common and ordinary, rode the arrogant and powerful aristocracy.

Charity drew the bedazzled Katy into a wide doorway. "I want ye t' wait here fer me. I'll come back and git ye as soon as I can. If I can't come, I'll send Davy."

Panic seized Katy. "Where are you going? Please, don't leave me."

"I but go to talk to Mistress Kettle. She has a kind heart, but gits in a fierce temper if she thinks people air tryin' t' run 'er business. I dare not take ye with me till I be explainin' all things to 'er and gittin' 'er good will. Now, don't worry," she assured Katy as she saw the fear etched on the white face, "it's shore I am all will be well. She wouldna be wantin' t' lose me, and if she don't want ye, she canna have me neither and I'm 'er best sempstress. Now don't ye be worryin'; I'll hurry. Ye jist wait right here. I'll be back before ye know it or I'll be sendin' Davy."

Charity reassured her agitated companion again as Katy hung onto her tightly; then kissing her on the cheek, she disappeared into the crowd. Katy paced back and forth. She watched the hurrying throng furtively. Her heart beat wildly whenever someone came near. The minutes seemed like hours. Several times seamen slowed to eye her, but she gave them a frosty, haughty look and pulling her hood further on

her head turned away from them praying they would pass her by.

After a long interval someone cleared his throat. She whirled around. The man wasn't too much taller than she, and probably in his middle forties, though it was hard to tell as his face was weather-tanned and seamed. He stood with his cap in hand appraising her. Approval showed in his grey eyes. Even though he was short he was brawny looking, his shoulders seemed too wide for his height. The hands that held his hat were square and calloused. Strong capable hands, gentle ones also, as she would later find.

"Come," he motioned to her.

"But I'm to wait here."

"Nay, yer t' come with me," he insisted.

Katy started to protest again, but he had already turned from her and was opening the door to the large carriage standing at the edge of the boardwalk. "Git in, girl, we must be off." He gently but firmly helped her into the coach and it immediately moved.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Where I be told t' take ye."

Katy sat staring at her tightly clenched fists. The uncertainty was frightening. She felt tears welling in her eyes but blinked and tightened her eyelids, refusing to let them fall. Why had she ever let Charity leave her? Where was this man Davy taking her?

"Where are we going?" she asked softly.

He sighed at her persistence. "To the Hawk."

"Hawk? Where is that?"

"It's not a where, it's a ship."

"A ship! I'm not supposed to go to a ship. I'm to go to Mistress Kettle's..."

"Mistress Kettle told me t' take y' to the Hawk."

"Oh..."

Katy sat back against the seat. Pulling the curtains back, she watched the marketplace disappearing. Vendors pushed

their carts filled with many tempting odors which rose to greet her nose. Her stomach, remembering it had not been fed since early morning, grumbled at the fast forced upon it. She closed her eyes as a wave of dizziness passed over her. A shrill voice pierced her ears and she looked upward into the eyes of a painted harlot hanging out of a window of a bordello. The sheer costume she wore revealed the wares she was selling at the top of her lungs.

"Hello, dearie, my ain't ye a pretty one."

Katy drew the curtain quickly, her face burning as she felt the quiet man's gaze upon her. From behind came the sound of shrill laughter. Katy's hands tightened in her lap and she moistened her dry lips, then clutched the lower one between her teeth.

She wrinkled her nose as the smells of salt water and tar and fish assaulted it. Looking out of the window, she saw they were at the wharves. The fog covered everything in a grey mantle. Loud sounds echoed from it as the carriage moved slowly through the mist. The vehicle stopped and the man opened the door and leaped out, then turned and offered Katy his hand. Clutching her possessions in one hand, she accepted his help. He grasped Katy's elbow and guided her forward. A brigantine of monstrous size appeared out of the mist. She gasped at the imposing galleon. Her eyes followed the tall, barren masts skyward. The sails were furled and secured to the booms. The Union Jack fluttered damply in the slight breeze; beneath it a black and silver banner flapped lazily. The outer strips were ebony and the center one of silver held a hawk just rising in flight, one leg extended and the other against its underbelly. A coiling serpent appeared to writhe in its beak as if struggling to be free. She was hurried across the gangplank onto the deck. Ship's tackle lay in neat piles and several men were slushing buckets of water across the wet deck while others were pushing long handled holystones to scour the thick wooden planks clean. The rest of the crew were busy with their many duties in preparing for the vessel's departure on

the evening tide, but as the young girl was hurried forward they stopped in their labors and watched her. Smirks and muttered suggestions met her furtive and embarrassed glances.

The companionway steps were steep and the corridor narrow and dark as she followed Davy. Knocking softly, he waited for her, then held the heavy oaken door open and motioned her inside. Katy's eyes were still obscured, but faintly she could see something in white move across the room. Her pulses set up a loud pounding in her ears. From the deep recesses of an anguished mind she heard the scream pierce through her, "Charity, where are you?"

Chapter 3

The cabin was suddenly bathed in light as a lamp was lit. Katy gasped almost audibly. The man standing behind the desk was glaring at her from black-hued eyes; shoulder length raven hair rivaled the obsidian glower; his nose jutted out like a beak, reminding her of the rapacious bird which flew from his banner topside. The visage was grim and cruel, suggestive of an unyielding mask. This feeling of his relentless cruelty grew more strongly upon her as the agonising moments crawled by. The square jaw was clamped tightly and the muscle jerked convulsively as if he were restraining an inner turmoil. His lips were drawn into a fine line in his displeasure; a thin mustache caressed his upper lip, and the clean shaven jaws were divided by a deep cleft.

"So this is the girl?" he demanded in a deep voice.

"Aye, sir."

He raised the silver goblet to his mouth and drank deeply, motioning with his free hand for her to remove her hood, observing her closely over the rim of the chalice.

Katy's hands trembled as she pushed the cowl back. He barred his arms across the thick, muscular chest, pursing his lips as he studied the quietly, composed young woman. She felt as if her whole body was trembling visibly and her heart beat wildly, violently.

"Take off your cloak." His voice was quiet yet carried the ring of command in it.

The seaman behind her helped to remove the heavy, wet mantle and took her small bundle of possessions. She raised frightened eyes to meet his, but they remained impassive, offering no encouragement or hope.

The Captain moved to the small spirits cabinet behind the desk and when he turned away Katy noticed his back criss-crossed with long slender welts which had healed to a purplish tint. He returned to his place with a decanter of brandy and poured the amber brew slowly. She continued to observe him through her heavy fringe of lashes. Having always worked around women before and never being near many men until the last few months, and then only those older or younger than the half naked male standing in front of her, she couldn't comprehend the emotions which sent a spreading warmth throughout her body. Her eyes traveled the length and breadth of him. His shoulders were broad and hard thewed, a heavy mat of black hair covered the wide chest; the white breeches encased a narrow waist and hips and long, sinewy legs. When she raised her eyes he was watching her with mocking eyes and smile. She blushed, dropping her glance quickly in shame.

"Come closer." With a liquid, graceful movement she obeyed. Drinking from the gleaming beaker in his hand, he eyed her closely, noting the exquisite beauty of feature and form. The Captain moved around in front of the desk and leaned one hip against it. His large right hand grasped the left hardened bicep while that hand resting upon his thigh still held the half-filled chalice.

"Are you sure she is the one?" he inquired of the waiting man, yet never taking his intent gaze from the silent girl.

"Aye, sir. She was but one doorway from the place she was t' be and no one else were around. But she be doin' a lotta walkin' back and forth like she were awaitin' fer someone, so I jist figured she were awaitin' in the wrong place. I waited past the time. She mentioned Mistress Kettle herself."

The penetrating eyes swept her again and slowly returned to her lovely face. "Are you one of Mistress Kettle's girls?"

"Yes sir, I was to be," she whispered, wishing her voice would stop quivering, revealing the fright possessing her.

With determined effort, she drew herself up as tall as she could. A satirical smile met the attempt at bravery and she appeared to melt as a candle does beneath the heated glow of a flame.

"Your bearing and speech are more than I could have hoped for. You are certain you are who you say you are."

"Yes, sir," she answered timorously, hardly above a whisper.

"Cast off, Billy."

The door closed softly behind her and Katy twisted at the front of her skirt fearfully. Charity had said nothing about a ship, an inward voice wailed.

"Take off your clothes," he told her in that soft voice with its demanding overtones. He raised the goblet again.

"I... I beg your pardon."

"They are wet and you are dripping on the carpet. Also your shoes." One long slender finger separated itself from the goblet and pointed to her feet.

She looked downward apprehensively, then raised her distraught eyes to his. The unyielding look still masked his face and she knelt quickly and struggled with the laces which had somehow become entangled. She noted with despair that her boots were completely ruined, her stockings displayed cold, white flesh in several places. The puddle from her wet and muddy clothes had stained the beautiful blue-toned Persian carpet. She winced, knowing if it had happened at Lord Percy's she would have felt a stick across her back. At the thought of Lord Percy and the terrible thing

she had done, she knew there was escape in the Hawk, and no matter where it was bound there would be freedom and a chance to begin again.

"Your clothes, madam."

Her head jerked upward as she knew from the sound of his voice he had moved closer to her. She arose and with quivering fingers unbuttoned her rainsoaked skirt, letting it fall around her feet; next followed her petticoat. She raised imploring eyes to his.

"The blouse."

The blouse joined the damp pile. The only change in him was the narrowing of his eyes.

As he moved closer her heart seemed to cease beating which in itself was an abrupt change; for moments before it had been buffeting her with a violent force. His hand reached out and touched her hair; she stiffened. Her face was colorless, her eyes held the haunted look of a trapped animal. His fingers slipped gently through the tresses, removing the few precious pins which held it in place; the damp cooper-hued locks cascaded down around her body.

"Beautiful," he breathed. His hand found its path through the long silken strands once more. "What is this?" He leaned closer. Katy could feel his warm breath on her cheek and smell the man scent which invaded her nostrils. "Blood? Are you injured?" As he moved her hair one firm mound was exposed to his view.

"N-no, m'Lord."

His eyes had not moved from her bosom. With fingers lightly touching the side of her face and throat, he traced them across her half bared breast sending shivers of an unknown origin down her spine.

"Well, well, Mistress Kettle has more than outdone herself this time," he growled. Feeling a shudder course through her, he frowned, his eyes darkening and flashing in anger. Katy knew not what she had done to pique him and shrank from him.

"Come, my dear, do not play shy with me," he told her

disdainfully. Taking her hand, he led her to the far corner which was shielded by a beautiful Chinese silk screen. Behind it stood a brass bathtub filled with steaming water.

"I knew you would be wet and cold, but never dreamt you would be half drowned also." His voice had softened, then once more took on the commanding tone. "Take off your shift and warm up. Enjoy the fresh water while you can; at sea there is only the salt water for this kind of pleasure." Her eyes grew larger as his fingers moved expertly at her bodice laces.

"You know all the tricks, don't you?" he said huskily. As her breasts burst out of their confinement, he stepped back in delighted surprise. His eyes then traveled from head to toe and back to her face again. A blush followed his gaze upward and rushed to reach her cheeks first, a warmth accompanied the rosy hue.

"God! Never have I seen a beauty such as you. Venus De Milo reincarnated." He watched breathlessly as her shift slipped to the floor. Taking hold of her wrist and restraining her, he devoured her naked loveliness.

Katy stepped quickly into the steaming water, suddenly afraid of the change which had crossed his face. He reluctantly released his hold on her. The hot water served as a covering for her chilled, frightened body. Through her consternation she was aware he was talking to her.

"There are no marks on your body. Where did the blood come from?"

All the anxieties of the last few days tumbled around her and the fear which had held her prisoner since Charity had left caught up with her and she started trembling uncontrollably. The tears burst from her as the sobs tore at her stricken throat. He let her cry until the passion was depleted, then extended a delicately lace trimmed handkerchief. She blew her nose, still continuing to emit dry, racking sobs.

"Well, lass . . . I shan't be required to continue calling you

that, will I?" He raised an eyebrow to his question. "You do have a name, I presume."

"Katy Coswell." She sniffed and blew her nose again.

"Well, Katy Coswell, it appears you have endured some unpleasant moments elsewhere, would you like to unburden yourself?" She shook her head. He shrugged. "Perhaps later."

Pulling a chair within the confines of the silken screen, he sat watching her, with long legs outstretched and ankles crossed. A look of amusement passed his face as she squirmed under his perusal. Crossing his arms over the black mat that covered the expanse of his chest, he continued to torment her. His eyes seemed glued to the milky-white mounds peeking from beneath the water. She crossed her arms to conceal the object of his attention; while rubbing her hands over her shoulders and upper arms she lowered her chin to one hand to avoid the probing eyes which seemed to consume her. Katy could hardly breathe, and her throat ached from the arid grate of swallowing. For a moment his attention was directed elsewhere as he fumbled for something in the small commode beside him. She drew back sharply when he reached for her. The water fled and returned with the sudden motion, revealing all that she sought to hide. A deriding chuckle broke his lips and he opened his hand for her inspection. A sweet smelling fragrance arose from the small, round ball lying in the center of his palm.

"Soap, m'lady, merely soap."

The hand trembled as she received the oval gift from him and her fingers burned where he had gently touched. She stiffened as she felt his hand run across her back.

"Again only soap, madam." He held another fragrant orb out for her scrutiny. His face was sober but Katy could see mirth lurking in the dark eyes.

She slowly tried to prolong the bathing for as long as she dared. He washed the blood from her hair and was now rubbing it dry. His hands had been gentle, yet she knew he

was not a gentle man. There was no understanding within her for this strange man. One moment he seemed hard and cruel, the next, tolerant. Why was she here? What did he want of her?

"Katy, truly you have the most beautiful hair I have seen. Thank God, it is not golden."

She smiled shyly. "Thank you, my Lord."

"Do not call me that!" he told her sharply, a dark look settling over his countenance. "My name is James Bartlett. You may call me Jamie."

"Yes, my—uh, Jamie," she stammered.

He smiled for the first time. Katy was amazed at the change in him. The harshly drawn lines gentled while a look of tenderness crept across his face. A hidden depression appeared in his right cheek and just as quickly disappeared.

"Why he—he's like a young god," she thought with surprise.

Arising, he held an enormous towel for her to step into. "Come."

Timidly she stepped out of the brass tub and felt the soft cloth drape around her. She felt his hand slip beneath her thighs and suddenly she was in his arms. Jamie carried her into the next room where an oversized bed dominated the chamber. He lowered his head to kiss her and she turned from him; his breath felt hot on her face as his warm, moist lips touched her cheek. The muscles of his chest and arms hardened against her tender flesh. She moaned and stirred in his arms, they tightened around her, restricting her feeble efforts. Amusement filled his eyes as he watched her. Laying her down on the bed, he drew the coverlet over her. Katy grabbed the end of it, pulling it up to her chin.

The Captain threw back his head and laughed. "Go to sleep, my lovely one. My ship comes before pleasure. No harm will come to you while I have breath in my body." He turned from her and reached for a shirt that had been carelessly thrown across the end of the bed. The muscles rippled across his back like water swelling across a rocky

brook. As he moved about the room she watched him, fascinated by his manly movements.

The hot bath and soft bed soon wove its hypnotic spell and Morpheus cast his hand sowing the sands of sleep around her. When Jamie turned to leave he saw that she was asleep. Her hair billowed out like a living flame against the pillow covering. Entangling his fist in it, he bent down and kissed her forehead.

"Sleep well, lovely one."

Hours later when Katy awoke she could hear men's voices coming from the Captain's cabin. The bed rocked gently and she sat up abruptly, trying to remember where she was. The quilt fell away to her waist. Katy listened intently, trying to hear the conversation.

"How did she get here?" she heard the Captain demand. She could imagine the dark mask descending across his angry face and an icy chill shook her.

"Like I told ye—" the voice began in explanation.

The Captain interrupted coldly, "Pray tell me again, Mr. Cruse, I seem to have been in a half-drunken stupor during your first briefing."

"Mistress Kettle agreed to Billy's and my plan fer she needed passage fer the piece of baggage anyhow's."

Katy frowned. She had thought they were discussing her at first, but evidently Mistress Kettle was in need of a ship to move an article or some merchandise. She was disappointed; she had hoped to learn why she had been sent aboard the seabound vessel.

Perhaps when Charity had approached the woman about hiring unseen help the unpredictable temper her friend had spoken of had flared and as punishment Mistress Kettle had decided to separate the two girls. Tears welled and escaped, running down her cheeks. Except for Colleen, Charity was the only friend she had ever had and now she was gone also.

If only there was some way to persuade the perverse captain to turn the ship around and return to shore and

release her. She pondered that problem a moment. The only thing of value she owned was the locket belonging to her mother and she knew she could never part with that precious possession.

"Oh, God," she implored, "help me to know what I must do. I am here by mistake surely and I am so afraid. The Captain terrifies me. I want to be with people who are gentle and kind like Charity." She brushed at the moisture bathing her face.

In the background she could hear an angry voice breaking through her anguish.

"I am perfectly capable of taking care of my own wants and needs, Mr. Cruse."

"Aye, sir."

"I have no need of a nursemaid. Do I make myself clear, sir?"

"Aye, sir."

"Damn! I seem to be surrounded by meddlesome fools and unwanted commodities. When I purchase something I usually like to pick it out myself. That is half the enjoyment of the purchase, is it not? God knows we are out too far now to think about going back if I am dissatisfied."

He laughed shortly. "Yet what could go wrong? She appears to be the perfect example of womanhood, if there is such a thing. Docile, well-mannered and beautiful." He paused. "She is a beauty, but my taste runs to an older, more experienced woman. They seem to get younger every year."

Katy shifted angrily in the bed. They *were* talking about her! Just as if she were a piece of furniture or some insignificant object. She moved again in disgusted anger as an elongated shadow crossed the beam of light on the cabin floor. Hurriedly, she drew back. Catching her movement out of the corner of his eye, the Captain stopped and glowered at her for several moments, clenching and unclenching his hands as he inspected her. Katy's eyes fell before his lustful stare and only then did she realise her nudity. Quickly she drew the covering up to her chin and slid down into the soft

down. Her body felt flushed and she wasn't certain whether or not it was completely from embarrassment. A door closed softly, then the Captain stood in the doorway.

"You are awake at last, I see." He moved to the bed. "Mr. Cruse, my first mate, will leave word with Baker, our cook, about your dinner. I had planned on dining with you, but I am afraid my appetites get beyond even my control at times and must be appeased." His voice and words plainly hinted toward a double meaning.

"I am not hungry, m'Lord," she whispered.

"Jamie," he reminded her firmly.

"Yes, sir." He raised his brow questioningly. "Jamie," she echoed fearfully.

A silence fell between them as if a heavy curtain had been dropped and the Captain commenced pacing back and forth eyeing her all the while.

Katy lay picking at the quilt, quailing within as a rabbit does lying in the brush waiting for the hunter's next move. She watched him through her thick fringe of lashes. A knock came at the door; she jumped, crying out in alarm.

"Come in, Billy."

The seaman entered bearing a tray of food and wine. Katy watched him with puzzlement; he was the same man who had brought her abroad the Hawk.

"But your name is Davy," she protested.

"Billy McDowell, mum," he corrected gently.

"But Charity said she would send Davy..."

"I know no Charity."

He set the tray down on the bedside table, then receiving silent instructions, withdrew.

Katy sat with a stunned look on her ashen face watching the seaman depart. "Captain—please, there has surely—a grave mistake," her voice came in a strained whisper.

"Mistake? Nay, my sweet, no mistake. I have been assured you are exactly what my considerate shipmates ordered. Now, sit here," he patted the side of the bed, "and eat or Baker will be upset and we will all suffer."

Katy drew the covering around her tightly and did as she was instructed. He was a man long used to being obeyed and she was fearful of not yielding to his every whim, for she could feel the strength of him with every breath she took. The few times he had spoken harshly to her his eyes had darkened to an obsidian blackness and a hard, impatient glint had appeared, his jaw becoming even more square with a stubborn line to it, the grim crease around his mouth and eyes deepening.

Clutching the coverlet, she pulled it up higher, trying to hide the soft silken roundness of her breasts swelling above the covering from his prying eyes. Dropping her eyes from his devouring stare, she ate but little, then laid the fork down on the edge of the beautiful, gold-rimmed china plate.

"That would hardly feed a sparrow, my sweet. Surely your intention is to bring the cook's ire down upon us."

Katy took up the utensil once more and with trembling hand picked at the remaining food. Nervously, she glanced at the Captain. He was leaning against the wall, arms and boots crossed watching her with amusement. The heavy silver fork fell from her shaking hand, crashing against the china, startling her. Flustered, she tucked the quilt under her arms and tried to cut the meat, but one side or the other would droop revealing her youthful loveliness. Immediately, she would clasp the covering around her again, blushing as she did so.

"God's nightgown, girl," he cried, shoving himself away from the wall, "what in the hell are you trying to do to me?" He stamped to his coffer and opened a drawer. Pulling out an elaborate, lace-trimmed shirt he tossed it to her. "Put that on and finish your dinner." Sweeping up the goblet of wine as he passed the table he threw back his head and drained the cup.

She struggled into the shirt under the cover and began buttoning it up. The shoulder seams hung almost to her elbows, making her look like a little girl just ready to break into tears. Intimidated by his sudden wrath she viewed him

surreptitiously. His dark-hued eyes were slitted and his jaw bone worked savagely.

"You are a sly slut. Why do you pretend? We both know the game you are playing, but if it gives you pleasure we will play it." His voice was low and cut her with an icy chill.

"Game? I know not what you mean, m'Lord." She swallowed. "Jamie."

He tried to shove the heavy mahogany table aside in his anger. The dishes rattled and fell to the floor. He sat down beside her, forcing her backwards.

Through clenched teeth he growled, "Oh, you know the game, my love. You play each detail to perfection. The innocent act, the flirting looks, the frightened virginal air..."

"But—but I am a virgin, m'Lord."

He threw back his head and laughed harshly, "As am I." He looked at her with that intense black glint of his for a few seconds and arose. It took but two strides of his long legs to reach the lamp which rested against the wall; twisting the switch the flame lowered, casting a faint glow toward the bed. Shadows flickered darkly against the wooden walls. His eyes sought the bed; the intimidated girl watched his every move. The Captain smiled grimly as she pulled the quilt tighter against her trembling body. Slowly, deliberately he unbuttoned his breeches, stormy eyes mocking her all the while.

Her eyes dilated and with quickened breath she watched his nakedness brazenly exposed to her. Katy's heart pounded so loudly she knew he could hear it, the pounding continued to increase. She could feel it in every pulse; she thought her ears would burst from the sound of it.

Crossing to the bed, he leaned over her. "Come, my sweet, there is surely room enough in there for the two of us."

Katy closed her eyes so he would not see the tears forming. She started to move as far to the other edge as she could and felt the bed sag as he climbed in beside her. Jamie stopped her movement by grasping her wrist. She felt his

hard muscular legs and the stiff bristled hairs brush hers before she jerked away.

He tossed the quilt to the end of the bed. The shirt was twisted tightly around the frightened girl and did very little to conceal the enchanting flesh beneath. His savage eyes ravaged her trembling body, taking in each minute detail; his breath quickened at the perfection. Wrapping his fist in the long, flaming tresses he jerked her head toward his leering lips, forcing her to look into his blazing eyes.

"Patience is not one of my better virtues, though I have tried to be a patient man and play along with this charade, but only up to a point, madam, and I have just about reached that cusp. We will finish our little game, with or without your cooperation." His voice grew husky, his breathing rapid and warm against her ear. He moved toward her again; as he fumbled with the buttons she closed her eyes tightly, fighting the terror rising inside her.

"Damn!" he cursed and ripped the shirt front away impatiently. He cupped her breast with his hand while his lips lightly caressed her face, moving downward across her throat. Against her hip she felt his manhood swell and harden and she trembled.

His hard calloused hand flitted lightly over her body. Strange emotions surged through her, swelling to a tremendous height, then bursting and expanding again. She whimpered and tried to move away. His hand was still entangled in her hair and he jerked her back against him, molding his body to hers until it felt as if every inch was scorched from the inferno of his passion.

"Katy, Katy, every man dreams of possessing a woman like you," he whispered hoarsely. His cruel mouth plundered its way toward her breasts and he ran his lips and tongue across the raised, hard nipples.

Every pulse in her body was beating a staccato tattoo and a cry of fear of the unknown escaped her lips. Angrily she lashed out at him, her small fists finding their mark against the hard thewed chest, one flailing fist caught him beside the

eye; before he could confine her hand in his she raked his cheek with her nails.

He slapped her; the sound of flesh on flesh resounded in her ears. Bright lights exploded in the darkness of closed eyes. The side of Katy's face stung from the fury of the blow.

She burst into tears, "Please, m'Lord, don't do this to me," she begged, pushing desperately against his chest. The awesome silence was broken only by the sobs and sounds of Katy's expended energy. She tried to struggle, to escape him, but the fright and exhaustion that enslaved her body made the struggle seem a sham. He imprisoned her small thrashing hands in one large one above her head. Her breath came in short, sharp pants from the wasted attempt. The spent and weakened thrusts only seemed to increase his libido.

The Captain's upper lip curled back revealing strong, white teeth. He laughed softly at her feeble efforts. "Play the game to the hilt, my sweet, it only makes the ride more enjoyable."

By the soft glow of the lamp she could see his face. The flickering light played upon it and she shuddered from the ruthless, savage look etched upon each feature. His eyes shone as cold, gleaming ebony, boring into hers, revealing the carnal desire within him.

"No, please, no," she pleaded despairingly. "Oh, God, no!" she screamed.

The burning emotions surging through him closed his ears and hardened his heart to her desperate entreaty. Straddling her, he forced her legs apart with his own. There was no struggle left in the despondent girl. It was as if part of her had departed the body and stood aside watching the defilement take place. Defeated and resigned she felt the hardened projectile pierce her body. He slowly and deliberately thrust inside, then deeper and deeper until she cried out from the stab of pain as her maidenhead was penetrated.

Tears flowed freely now as she realised from that moment on a new threshold had been crossed and the door to the old

life was forever closed; for no longer was she a maiden, but now a woman.

The harsh look slowly disappeared from his face as the truth crept through the tides bursting within him.

"God's truth! You weren't lying, you are a virgin," he gasped.

Deep inside a moan forced its way up and out as he was caught in the frenzy of desire and rocked back and forth, thrusting deeper and harder with every move. She felt the eruption of his fervent lust explode inside her. He remained crouched over her, panting now from his own struggle, his bestiality fulfilled.

It seemed to Katy he remained in that position for an eternity and when she raised remorseful eyes to his, she was shocked at the tenacious and brutal look which met hers.

Retreating, he rolled slowly to one side, sprawling beside her, his chest rising and falling heavily. Finally, he arose and walked to the stern window and opened it. Cool, fresh air rushed in like a soothing balm, gently caressing her fevered and ravished body as he had not. The sadistic captain stood naked and rigid at the window looking out at the star filled sky, then turned embittered eyes on her. A soft curse broke the silence. Katy shuddered, whether from the oppressive silence that filled the room or the barbarous man, she knew not.

Turning her face into the pillow Katy cried softly. Shame rushed over her in waves and she felt she would never be able to view herself in a mirror again. After a long while she could hear him moving about quietly. Turning tear drenched eyes toward the loathsome man, she watched him dress. He moved on silent feet to the door and closed it behind him noiselessly.

Katy lay quietly looking at the cross beams which stretched across the ceiling, letting her mind sort out the horror which she had endured. With eyes tightly closed she let the invisible fingers of her mind run lightly over her abused body. She felt as if she had been stripped of all she

had ever held honourable and virtuous. Her lips felt bruised and swollen from his demanding and plundering mouth, every inch of her body ached from the violent outrage he had inflicted upon it; her breasts stung from the cruel use of his brutal hands and mouth. When she tried to move her leg, her thighs and groin protested with a throbbing spasm, doubling her up with a wail. Her hand crept forward seeking the source of the pain; the warm flesh was coated in a sticky wetness. Holding her palm up in the dim light, she saw that it gleamed scarlet in the feeble, yellowish beam.

Katy's eyes grew wide in wonder and fear as her hand once more sought the source of the crimson flow. Anger swelled inside her as she remembered the bestial, savage thrusts of the animal who had used her. Tears burst out anew as she tore a piece of the shirt he had ripped from her and wadded it between her legs to arrest the flow.

After awhile she crawled painfully out of bed and made her way slowly to the corner protected by a screen. There she found a basin and an ewer of water. Fresh linen hung from the wall. She scrubbed herself harshly, cruelly, wanting to rid herself of the touch and feel of him. Hatred surged through her on searing waves.

"Oh, God, what have I done to merit this nightmare?" came the silent wail from heart and soul. "Why in heaven's name am I here with this madman? Am I always to be at his beck and call and pleasure now that he has used me so vilely? Oh, God, no please. I can't bear the thought, let alone the deed." Her childish dreams of a tender love-smitten swain pleading on bended knee for her affection lay in ashes at her feet. What man would have her now, soiled and used as she was? Her hands clasped her aching throat and felt the drench of bitter tears.

Suddenly, she stiffened. Every nerve froze as she heard someone moving around in the outer cabin. She hobbled noiselessly to the bed and lay huddled in a trembling ball, watching the door. Fear pushed all thoughts of hatred aside.

Maybe if she didn't fight him he would be kinder and tire

of her more quickly. Never had she known a person could fear someone as she did him. Envisioning his black, angry scowl, Katy's fist flew to her mouth to hold the cry of despair inside.

Trying to understand her feelings, knowing that she must hate him, she lay awake most of the night waiting and dreading his return. Inconsistent emotions tore through her mind; one part did despise him, but deep inside was another feeling neither defined nor understood. Living her life without love or affection, now a man in his desire had forced himself upon her, stealing the only precious thing that she possessed. In vain she waited for the dread, or the anger, or the hatred to bubble up inside and abide there. Her aching, exhausted body was void of all emotion, it seemed to float in a nebulous mist of lethargy.

Her brain told her that lust was neither love nor affection, but the heart argued that desire could be the first step toward affection and affection the next step to love. It seemed as if brain and heart argued the point for hours until her head ached. Common sense advised listening to neither, while wounded emotions demanded revenge upon the offender.

Katy lay awake most of the night waiting for his return with fear and apprehension. Finally, just before dawn she fell into a fitful sleep, thankful that he had not returned.

She was awakened late in the morning by light noises in the Captain's cabin. Laying very still and trembling violently, she clutched the quilt tightly beneath her chin.

The door opened slowly and instead of the fearsome captain, Billy thrust his head in and seeing her awake, grinned. "I have the Mistress's breakfast."

Katy smiled shyly and sat up.

"The Capt'n has already broken his fast and is on the quarterdeck," he called, collecting and rattling the dishes.

She wondered how she could be glad and disappointed at the same time, being certain when she awoke this morning she would be unconsolable and ashamed. Shame and anger should have been her awakening thought, she told herself,

but there was no remorse; perhaps it would come later. Her main fear at the moment was how to face the domineering captain when he did appear. Everytime she thought of him shivers of awe and anticipation fingered their way through her blood. Never had she known such an overpowering and demanding overlord as he. He had but to glower at her with that black scowl and terror racked every nerve and sinew.

The seaman laid the tray across her lap and started to move away.

"B-Billy, wait, please," she begged blushinglly.

He stopped and turned to her. Looking Katy over very carefully he thought, "She looks like a scared, little lass lyin' there. She is so beautiful." Angry thoughts stirred in his breast as he tried not to think of what surely had taken place in the over-sized bed the night before. Giving a mental shake, he reminded himself that the Captain was his master and the girl a whore, bought and paid for solely for the Captain's pleasure.

"Billy, tell me something of the Captain," she was saying.

"What would y' be wantin' t' know, miss?"

She shrugged at his question. "I don't know. I guess, who he is, where he comes from..." Her voice trailed off and she shrugged again with uncertainty. "Just something about him."

"As ter who 'e is, he's the bastard son of Lord Thomas Bartlett, may 'is soul rot in hell. He is now a planter from Virginia in the New World and sometimes a privateer, though that means less and less these days."

"Are you one of his pirates?"

Billy smiled at her choice of words, "Nay, mum, there are no pirates any more, privateers they call us now. There be a difference, ye know; now with certain papers, letter-o'-marque they call 'em, we kin plunder legally. As t' bein' a seaman, yea and nay. I were in prison when I first met 'im. Mean and surly I was, so they decided to end their problems and mine by hangin' me. The Capt'n was outfittin' a ship at Newgate, so 'e bought me."

"He bought you?" she asked incredulously.

"Aye, the same as ye." A cloud crossed her eyes at the remark and she frowned, but shifted her attention back to Billy as he continued, "Only I be signed on to 'im fer twenty years."

"Of your own free will?"

"Aye, at the time it seemed to be the proper thing to do if I planned to go on breathin'. That be about four or five years ago, I guess. I could be free, but don't care t' be. This way I kin see to the Capt'n and he sees t' me."

"But he is so—so cruel."

"The Capt'n cruel?" He laughed. "Oh, ye mean the scowls. He uses 'em as a mask to hide the feelings underneath. True, he do have a fierce temper and must be obeyed, but nay, Mistress, not cruel."

She finished her breakfast and as Billy was removing the tray asked for her clothes.

"The Capt'n threw 'em overboard. 'Not fittin','" he said.

"Threw them overboard! Am I to run about—" she stopped, feeling the blush creep across her face as he stood grinning at her.

"Nay, I'll git somethin' fer ye t' wear." He went out and returned in a short while with an armload of clothes and laid them at the foot of the bed, then excused himself.

She dressed hurriedly. "Well, he certainly picked the proper colour—gray," she muttered looking at her reflection in the large, ornate mirror. She brushed her hand down the front of the dress liking the softness of the Italian lawn and studied her image. The square cut of the decollete did little to conceal the swelling mounds beneath and when bending over she found she was in danger of losing the little covering available. Wide, elaborate lace trimmed the bodice on either side in a somber pearl-white, full sleeves billowed widely just below her elbows; the skirt was tightly gathered and full. She struggled with the back lacing, finally closing the gap and tying the ties. Her personal belongings were found on top of the large chest. Closing the clasp on her locket and pulling it

around to the front she felt the coldness of the golden pendant fall between her breasts. While binding her hair, she inspected the room.

The furniture gleamed a reddish-brown; heavily hand-carved and gilded, it was breathtakingly beautiful. The cabin was large, but the cumbersome furniture made it appear smaller. There was the oversized bed, which Katy avoided looking at, taking up one side of the cabin, the large chest and great mirror and screened area for the morning ablutions covering the other side. The brass tub in which she had bathed the preceding evening had somehow found its way behind the screen and was standing mute and cold, waiting to be emptied. Katy shivered, thinking *he* had bathed earlier while she had slept.

Her eyes continued their tour of the room. A table and two large chairs stood near the bed. "Even when he's away, he still dominates the room," she thought. At the aft end of the cabin was the stern gallery which stretched across the width of the ship. Five large winged windows exposed the grandeur of the sapphire waters to her view. A leather padded window seat invited her over to observe the placid waters. The windows were open and the fresh salty smell of the ocean drew her to the seat. She watched the white capped waves lap silently against the side of the ship. The day proved to be bright and glaring from the sun, yet cool from the soft sighing breezes. She could hear the sounds of many voices drifting downward to her. Suddenly she was lonely for company.

Billy was puttering in the outer cabin and she called to him, "Am I allowed on deck?"

"Ye must be askin' the Capt'n that, mum. The men kinda frown on women bein' topside. They think it be bad luck."

Her eyes still enjoying the beauty of the sea, Katy frowned and shook her head. "Do you mean to tell me that sailors still practice that superstition?"

"The English have always been a superstitious breed, my sweet, especially those who follow the sea."

She whirled at the first sound of his voice, fear tugging at her heart.

He stood with hands on hips filling the doorway, reminding her of the stories she had heard of pirates. His long, flowing mane was caught back in a knot at the nape of his neck and a white band encircled his head. A black, silken blouse opened to the waist revealed the heavy matted, muscular chest; the blouson sleeves were caught tightly at the wrists and his long, sinewy legs were enveloped in black, tight fitting breeches which had been cut off at the knees exposing sun browned legs and bare feet. The scratch on the side of his face blazed a bright red. Katy felt his sardonic look touch her and knew him to be mentally stripping her one garment at a time. His gaze lingered upon the revealing bodice and then traveled upward. When their eyes met she saw amusement settle in his and he touched the wound; she felt the blood rush to her face in remembrance.

The blush touched an unknown raw wound. "Don't do that, it only makes you more desirable, if that is possible," he said bitterly.

"I'm sorry, m'Lord." Her voice trembled.

The scowl deepened, the dour lines around his eyes and mouth appeared. "And do not call me that! My sire is a Lord, I am only his bastard!" Katy was startled by the malice in his voice and the darkened pall which settled across his face.

"You may use my cabin and I will see that a canopy is set up topside to protect you from the sun. You may come up for a short time late mornings and late afternoons, otherwise I confine you to the cabins." He could see the question in her eyes. "The crew will not work while you are on deck; they will want to watch the Captain's pretty, young doxy instead."

Her eyes blazed at the name he had chosen for her, but he appeared not to notice. "I suggest you wait until this afternoon so I can make the arrangements." He turned on his heels and left.

She stamped her foot. "Oh, I hate him! I loathe him! Doxy, am I?" Tears welled and anger fled as she was engulfed

in a sea of self-pity. "If I am, it is only because he had made me so." She crossed the room to where Billy was making the bed and began to help him.

"No, mum, I kin do this," he protested.

"Nonsense, I have been doing this kind of drudgery all my life."

"But the Capt'n..."

Anger flared once more. "Hang the Captain!" She jerked at the quilt. The splotch of blood in the middle of the bed seemed to leap out at them. The ache between her thighs served as a second reminder of her lost virginity and the sudden anger melted once more into remorse over her humiliating defeat.

She glanced at Billy. He was watching her with a look of dread and anguish. "Oh, my lady, y' really weren't the right one, was ye."

Katy felt the blush tinge her whole body. She dropped her eyes before his sorrowful gaze and longed to flee and hide in shame at his knowledge.

"I'm sorry, mum, I was so sure ye were the right one—I don't mean ye look like—" he stammered in embarrassment, then plunged bravely on. "What I mean is, the Capt'n needs someone to comfort 'im and take care of 'im, if ye know what I mean." He saw Katy's mouth twist in disgust from her personal knowledge of the Captain's needs of comfort and care. "Anyways, when I seen ye, I knew ye was the right one fer 'im."

"The Captain really doesn't need anyone but himself," she told the servant bitterly.

"Ah, but he do, mum. Fer days befer I found ye he locked hisself up in 'is cabin with a bottle, drinkin' hisself into a bloody stupor. The Capt'n don't have too much regards fer women, he feels thëy be simple minded. That their main object in life is to make a man miserable with their lyin', schemin' ways. The Lady Amelia didn't help none."

"The Lady Amelia?"

"Aye, Amelia Darcy." Billy's voice matched the scorn

incised on his rough, craggy face. "Fer some years now she's told 'imself they was t' marry as soon as she got 'er inheritance. She's teased 'im and dangled 'im fer four years now. She be a beautiful woman, all golden and white with blue eyes to flutter at 'im and lead 'im on. He danced t' her tune all this while, lookin' fer the time he'd take 'er home t' Virginia. Every year he left 'is plantation and all that was 'is to overseers and slaves jist t' be near 'er. It's a wonder 'e ain't lost everythin' fer that fickleheaded ninny. Then one day out of the blue, she ups and marries Lord Markley; the power and wealth that dandy had bein' more'n enough ter turn 'er mercenary head. Without even lettin' the Capt'n know of 'er newly wedded husband she still played 'er little tune and my master danced 'is little jig with 'er enjoyin' the best of two worlds. Then one night 'er husband returned unexpectedly and found 'em. The Capt'n had t' kill 'im in a duel. When 'e went back to claim 'is lady she ranted and raved like a mad woman, finally orderin' him off 'er property and callin' 'im a lowly bastard, not fit t' be anything but a low Virginia farmer and pirate. Every since then he's been deep in a bottle until today. So ye see, mum, ye was the best one fer 'im after all. He's been actin' like hisself fer the first time in days."

Katy turned from Billy despairingly, "But the price—my God—the price—" her mind wailed hopelessly.

Billy didn't notice how deeply his words had cut her and he continued, "He should git over that lassy real soon. She couldna hold a candle to ye." Taking the dirty linen he left the room.

Despondently Katy walked the floor trying to unravel the twisting and turning nightmare in which she was enmeshed. Billy's words kept haunting her. She felt she had found the key to Jamie's cruel and seemingly unfeeling heart.

Later inspecting the Captain's cabin, she found a great desk matching the furniture in the bed chamber standing to one side of the smaller cabin. A gold damask lounge stood in one corner; behind the couch, against the wall was a small bookcase containing several books. She was delighted and

taking one down, reclined on the couch and soon become engrossed in the leather volume.

Time passed swiftly under the spell of the enchanting tale unfolding within the printed pages and Katy had no idea how long the Captain had been watching her.

"You never cease to amaze me. You read also?" He drew his mouth down at the corners as if in bemusement. "And Chaucer, no less."

She started at the first sound of his voice. He was leaning against the desk with a goblet of brandy in his hand.

"Yes, I read," she replied with temerity, "I also write and figure a little," pride creeping into her low reply.

"Where did you learn all of these amazing accomplishments?" he asked sarcastically, downing the brandy and pouring more.

She hesitated, not wanting to give him that information, until his dark eyes turned on her again demanding an answer.

"At Lord . . . where I used to live."

"Did this Lord—where you used to live—teach you any other accomplishments?" he asked her coldly in a voice filled with ridicule.

Katy watched him, puzzled at his coldness and overweening behaviour, remembering the warmth and love that had crept into Billy's voice while speaking of the Captain. As he continued to eye her she stammered, "I—I know how to s-sew and I was t-trained to be a maid to my Lady."

Over the rim of the goblet he continued to eye her with derision. "I suppose you are going to tell me you left your employment to become a seamstress or some other menial to Mistress Kettle."

"Why—yes, how did you know?" she asked, amazed at his knowledge.

A smirk appeared at the corner of his mouth and his voice derided her coldly, "Come, Katy, surely you can think of something better than that, can't you? If you must fabricate a lie, at least let it be an intelligent one."

"But—but it *is* the truth," she insisted.

"Why would you trade a sheltered life, as you surely must have led by your demeanor and your virginity, for a life in a whorehouse?"

His chaffing tone and manner stabbed against her agonised mind and heart ruthlessly, while he regarded her quietly with an arrogant mien. Wounded emotions swirled through the hurt and confusion which imprisoned her and she raised dazed eyes to meet his dark gaze. The chill found there sent a surge of fear through her and she shuddered.

She swallowed deeply, "In a what?" she whispered.

"In a whorehouse." His eyes glinted mockingly. "Just what kind of girls did you think Mistress Kettle employed?"

"Charity said she would get me a job as a sempstress," she insisted, her voice trembling on the edge of tears. "I know nothing of a—of that which you imply so vilely."

He threw back his head and laughed, "'Mistress Kettle's House of Paradise'; does that grandiose name of our fabulous Mistress Kettle's—establishment—suggest a quaint shop of industrious *ladies* sewing?" His laughter continued, harshly, coarsely. Katy coloured, deeply embarrassed by his vulgarity and wished that she might faint so this hideous conversation could be ended.

"That is the most asinine excuse to join a bordello I have ever heard. Do you actually think that I would believe one of Mistress Kettle's girls would hire someone that looks like you to sew dainty stitches?" He laughed again jeeringly, shaking his head at her attempt of deceit.

"You but strengthen my faith in women, madam," he snarled raising the goblet to his lips.

The angry young woman jumped to her feet and stood facing him, hands on hips, bust rising and falling rapidly, foot tapping with a wrath never felt before. "I tell you it is the truth, sir, and Charity was one of the nicest girls I have ever known and would never be—like that! Nor do I lie, sir!"

"Then why did you leave his Lordship?" he taunted.

"Because I killed . . ." she cried out in anger. Realising she

had revealed the horrendous secret, she stood watching the fearful man, aghast.

"You killed whom?"

She turned her back on him. "Lord Carstair," she snapped.

His manner softened as did his voice, "Why, Katy?"

"Because he tried to rape me!" she cried in anguish, shedding irate tears.

He stiffened, the dark mask veiled his visage, giving him a stark appearance. His sun-brown face took on an ashen hue as he stared at the straight, tense back of the sobbing girl.

"Isn't that the secret wish of every woman?" he asked nastily, thrusting away the guilt rising in his breast.

Casting him a hateful look, Katy turned again. "Not of this woman, but the intent surely must be of every man, considering I have suffered at the hands of two such brutes in a short period of time. Would to God my hand had found a blade for you also, m'lord," she replied bitterly.

He moved to her, putting his hands on her rigid shoulders, forcing her to face him. "Then why was I so fortunate? Why were you so docile with me?" he asked in clipped, angry tones.

"Docile! Was I docile with you, m'lord, you with your great brutish strength? I tried to protect that which was precious to me, but I was so frightened of you and exhausted from my long journey. And you, you're so big and grim; a harsh, cruel man." She trembled at the feel of his hold upon her.

"Are you still frightened of me, Katy?" he asked softly, his large hands tightening on her shoulders. He moved his palms in a circle, almost in a gentle caress.

She bit at her lower lip nervously and nodded.

"You mustn't be afraid of me, Katy. I have no desire to hurt you. A woman like you was made to be loved."

"Loved! By you?" She jerked away from him. "I fear you, m'lord, for you are a man of many moods that I can not understand. I fear you, because you dominate everyone and

everything around you. My every thought and action has ceased to be my own in the short hours I have been aboard your ship. Even when you are not here I feel you watching me, and I am afraid, for I feel that I must please you."

"You wish to please me? Then just be yourself, do not even try to be anything else except your own sweet, innocent self, for I detest lying, scheming women. For the injustice I have done you, I beg pardon." He cupped her face in his hand and raised it to his own. Yet even as he apologised she could see desire rising in his eyes, belying his solemn words.

"Even to touch you is to desire you," he whispered. His mouth descended on hers. She tried to push him away. A cry of dismay and anger was muffled against his plundering mouth. She tried to claw at his face with her nails, but he grabbed her wrist, securing her hand behind her back in a grip of iron.

"No," she gasped. "Not again," she cried angrily.

His tense muscular thigh rested against hers and in desperation she thrust her knee upward, but the force of the thrust was hampered by the gathered skirts of petticoat and gown. Guessing her intention he turned his hip, taking the weakened blow there. He grinned at her with a wicked smile and his teeth flashed behind the curved mocking lips. Her breath was coming in short gasps and with easy effort his hand touched her where it willed as she struggled vainly to repel the offender.

"Blackguard," she cried, "lecher!"

Her strength was nearly expended in the brief struggle and the mocking smile never left his lips. Tears burned Katy's eyes as she recognised the futility of the battle.

Laughingly, the arrogant Captain pulled her to him. She lay against his chest exhausted, her breath whistled softly through parted lips.

"Surrender, my sweet," he whispered.

"Never, I am not your doxy, not your—" she buried her face against his chest sobbing.

His hand caressed her hair gently. "Our voyage has barely

begun, my sweet. It was inevitable that you lose your virginity sooner or later, if not to me than to someone else. No man would let a beauty such as you escape for long. That it gave me pleasure first does not fill me with remorse, so do not try to prick my conscience over the fact that you think I stole your chasity by rape."

She tried to pull away from him but only succeeded in stepping back into a circle of flesh-covered steel. "Conscience! Dear Lord in heaven! Surely you jest, sir, for you have no conscience!" she told him caustically.

He laughed shortly, "'Tis no jest, madam, for that fact has often been told me by friend and foe alike."

He pressed his lips against her throat. She groaned in despair as his mouth moved upward slowly and captured hers in a long passionate kiss. Her eyes flew open when his tongue forced its way into her mouth, darting, seeking, claiming, demanding.

She felt the little strength left to her melt and seep from her body as she clung to him. He smiled inwardly as he sensed her surrender and renewed his ardent efforts eagerly. His kisses seemed to engulf her in an intoxicating mist, as they moved over her face and throat and bosom, leaving her breathless. Her mind gave a weakened thrust before it too was enfolded in that giddy cloud of stupefying bliss. His hand plunged into her bodice and cupped her breast, as he continued to hold her face tightly against his. No longer was the touch offensive and repulsive, but stirred within her the sensuous emotions draining her of will and strength.

He picked her up and carried her into the bedchamber. She lay weak and spent in his arms. He kicked the door closed, lowering his mouth upon hers once more. Unwillingly, she felt her mouth returning the passionate kiss, and she felt as if she had been running a long race. Her heart thundered beneath her breast. Her limbs felt drained and heavy. Laying her down on the bed he fumbled at the lacing with trembling hands.

Gathering her last ounce of dwindling strength, Káty

protested weakly, clasping his wrists with shaking hands, "No, please, not like this."

Angrily, he shook her hands away, "What do you mean, not like this?" he snarled. "For God's sake, woman, what do you expect? You tease and taunt a man one moment and promise him paradise with your soft words, those damned innocent green eyes and that impertinent mouth, then the next moment try to cast him down into hell as he approaches the gates. Do you think a man will not storm those gates to claim what is his? God's truth, woman, this man will!" His long fingers found the top of the already revealing bodice, tearing it away ruthlessly. She tried to melt into the down softness of the mattress as the satanic face lowered toward hers. His ebony eyes blazed as if from a fever. Through clenched teeth, he growled, "I claim my right to paradise and insist on entering now!"

Chapter 4

The days aged into weeks and the occupants of the Hawk, both topside and below deck, settled into a solemn routine. The crew went about their duties with long faces and surreptitious grumblings, only breaking through the downcast mood on occasions when the depressing weather and surrounding gloom lifted, creating a feeling of unreserved jollity among the younger members. Their merriment soon became contagious, infecting everyone aboard. Nimble fingers replaced those made clumsy by the restraint placed upon them the past days. Several pairs of avid eyes found their way toward the area forbidden them by the Captain. Wide grins and amused gazes silently voiced their opinions of the young doxy the Captain claimed as his own.

The sun glared harshly against the placid azure waters. Katy lay against the feather pallet, taking her leisure on the warm, lucent day. Her arm shielded her eyes from the brilliant glow. In the background she could hear the faint motion of the canopy as it rolled indolently. The air was

nearly lifeless. Even the sea was quiet as the golden sun dominated the white, hot day. The untimely heat had driven her on deck before her accustomed hour. The light breeze that was blowing did no more than move the close torrid air around.

A deep bass voice carried across the air a seaman's ditty and was joined by others one at a time:

"For grog is our starboard, our larboard,
Our mainmast, our mizzen, our log,
At sea or ashore, or when harbor'd,
The mariner's compass is grog."

Katy smiled as she listened to the laughter and jovial mood that pervaded the atmosphere. The monotonous dip and sway of the vessel mesmerised her. The crew that passed within her partial vision was dressed for the oppressive day. They had stripped down to the knee length cut-off pantaloons, yet she could see the sweat clinging in small beads to the short hairs of their arms and chests, glistening in the sunlight.

The perspiration crawled slowly over her own body, wetting the light-weight, grey gauze gown at the back and under her breasts and arms. She moved the fan she held lazily back and forth feeling the tepid air brush her face and neck. Movement caught her eye and she watched the two youngest members of the crew pulling themselves up the rat lines toward the booms.

"Slacken off the wind and shorten the sail!" Jamie's deep voice called.

Katy sat up and turned to watch him. Shading her face with her arm, she squinted against the harsh glare. He had come up on the quarter-deck and now stood near the helm with one hand on the binnacle where the compass and navigational gear were housed. Raising the other hand to his forehead, he watched the action above for a moment then his eyes swept the sky. In the far south-eastern sky the darkening

clouds were swooping into the sea, thirstily sipping at the tranquil water. Bloating and swelling and growing with the unpredictable ire of the early spring storms of the southern clime, they seemed to boil in a turbulent fury. Silver threads darted in and out of the dark fabric of cumulus puffs binding them together in large, angry, distended bundles.

"Damn! Storm abrewing," she heard him mutter to the first mate, then his eyes once more followed the mast upward. She saw him frown as he watched the two boys.

They straddled the boom laughing and inching their way across the spar to either end securing the shrouds to the large beam. Katy shuddered at the great height separating them from the Hawk's deck. Reaching up to the gaff above them they released the lines of the furled sheet and watched the top-gallent rise slowly in the torpid breath and gradually billow with a rolling and tossing indifferent loud snap. Their fingers worked nimbly to secure the shortened sail. The older of the two yelled something to the other one but it was caught in the upward breath of a fickle breeze and soared skyward. The boys laughed and called back and forth betwixt themselves and the Captain threw them an annoyed glance as he stood leaning against the gunwale instructing Mr. Cruse.

Finally he looked upward again to see the cause of the irritating laughter. "You two stop that blathering up there and furl that canvas so it can be repaired before that storm hits," Jamie yelled.

One of the lads shinnied down the line to the boom below. The other one struggled nervously to complete his task as he felt the bold eyes of the Captain still upon him. His fingers suddenly seemed to be all thumbs.

"You up there—get on with it."

"Aye, sir."

Jamie eyed him impatiently. "Ye gods, where did we pick him up?"

"He's jist new, sir, first trip," Mr. Cruse replied.

"Hasn't anyone taught him how to secure a line yet?"

Mr. Cruse moved toward the taut rat line. "I'll go topside and help him, sir."

"Don't bother, I'll do it myself," Jamie snapped.

Katy rose slowly, intently watching Jamie pull himself hand over hand up the thick hemp. He ascended the futtock shrouds, pushing and hauling himself skyward via hand and toe.

The young boy fearfully observed the ill-tempered man coming closer and moved restlessly on the yardarm. He had often heard the crew murmur about the Captain's abrupt temper and now saw the evidence quickly ascending. Terror of the fearsome man gripped him. Jamie was just hefting himself upward, his thighs barely touching the rounded beam and ready to throw a leg over when the frightened lad shifted his position. His foot slipped upon the smooth, outcurved yard and he fell onto the unbalanced man.

One hundred pounds more or less of screaming, wiggling boyhood hurled against his chest knocking the wind out of him. Subconscious effort alone commanded the hard thewed arms to shove outward, then he enfolded the struggling boy tightly against his chest.

Katy screamed and to her horrified eyes the two bodies hurled through space, breaking through the smooth, shimmering waters. The splash defiled the quiet depths, agitating the sea more than the lethargic drift of the huge vessel, for not even the insignificant eddies of the ship's wake marred the illusory looking-glass surface.

She rushed to the gunwale and leaned over the railing. In the background she could hear Mr. Cruse shouting commands and heard one of the dinghys being lowered; the chains protested loudly against the sudden disturbance and the small boat bumped noisily into the hull in its haste to be free. She gasped in relief as two heads finally appeared and bobbed up and down in the placid waters. She could see the boy struggling, then Jamie's fist lashed out and struck the unlucky lad. Jamie started for the boat towing his burden.

As the Captain fell with his screaming, struggling encumbrance he tried to see if the push against the spar had been strong enough, but the shrieking fledgling's head or other parts of his anatomy found their way to block his view. He held the lad tighter, straining to catch sight of their landing place. He had no desire to be splattered across the deck of the Hawk. The blue of the sea revealed itself and he quickly gasped for air.

He felt himself cut the water cleanly and the plunging bodies descended deeply. The boy still contended against him, now in complete terror. Jamie tried to control the grappling youth, but somehow lost his grip on him. Twisting and turning he looked for his companion. The salt water burned his eyes; his chest ached from the lack of oxygen. He gave one last look and pushed himself upward, the pang in his chest increasing to a searing pain. He looked above him but could not see the top of the water; a moment of apprehension seized him and he thrust it aside in irritation. He knew this was no time to panic. Seconds later his head broke water and the cool air caressed his face and he drew great labouring gasps of the delicious ambrosia into his bursting, burning lungs.

About five feet away the boy was wheezing and coughing and struggling wildly to stay afloat, then sank beneath the water. Jamie swam to the spot where he had disappeared and diving below, anxiously searched for the drowning boy. The Captain's hand raked against the lad's face and Jamie grasped the mop of hair and drew him upward. As they emerged the youth began to struggle.

"Hold still, dammit, or you'll drown both of us!" Jamie shouted.

Huge, rounded blue eyes alive with fear, but numb against all reasoning stared back at the angry man. His arms and hands were everywhere, grasping and jabbing frantically as Jamie tried to control them. Finally a mighty arm struck out and a rock hard fist connected against the youthful jaw.

All motion ceased. Grasping the unconscious boy under the chin he swam toward the small boat racing across the waters toward them.

Willing hands reached out for the youngster, then the Captain hauled himself into the boat. He sat with head down, breathing heavily; after a few moments he looked at the men bending over the stunned youth.

"Turn him over your lap and get the water out of him," Jamie panted.

One of the crew sat down and the boy was lain across his knees, head dangling. The sailor commenced to push lightly but firmly on his back. Soon there was a harsh racking cough and a whoosh as the water spewed forth. The pounding and coughing continued until the boy protested and sat up. He looked at the Captain and dropped his eyes guiltily.

"What is your name, boy?"

"Jim Reed, sir."

"Well, Jim Reed, that was quite an experience." He paused and watched the boy intently. "Are you afraid of heights, Jim?" He paused again. "That was fear I saw in your eyes before you fell into me."

"—I ain't befeared o' ye or nothin'—" Jim lashed out and glared at the Captain.

An amused glint appeared momentarily in Jamie's eyes and he quickly veiled it, replacing it with a deriding regard.

The boy faltered, "—sir," he added lamely.

"I am sure you are not afraid of me—or anything, nevertheless, I shall keep my eye on you from now on, mister. Do not let me catch you in another mistake. Report to Mr. Cruse and let him assign you to someone who can teach you how to be a good sailor, I want no fumbling fingers aboard my ship."

"Yes, sir," Jim grumbled, vexed that the Captain should keel-haul him in front of the other men.

"And the next time you think I am in need of a bath, tell me. I would just as soon take it in the safety of my own tub."

The lad's eyes searched the Captain's face until he located

the amused look which matched the tone heard in the voice. "Aye, sir," he grinned.

The dinghy bumped against the Hawk and Jamie arose. He glanced toward the quarter-deck as he started forward. Katy was leaning against the railing. Her face was stark white, but it was her eyes that captured his attention; they dominated her whole countenance with their panic-stricken apprehension. Her pale lips silently uttered one word time and again. He thought she was praying. Waving the others ahead of him, he stood watching her. A jaded smirk settled in the right corner of his mouth drawing it downward, emphasizing the self-satisfaction that arose within him.

"So my little Ice Maiden, there is warmth in your breast for me," he muttered to himself.

She felt the horror of the preceding moments drain from her body; those dark-hued subjugating orbs leaving her weak and trembling. The trance was suddenly broken when the hateful smirk settled across his face. Feeling a quick surge of anger warm her chilled blood, she indignantly fled the deck and descended the steep companion ladder to safety.

Jamie was last aboard and the crew crowded around thumping him on the arms and back, asking questions which he answered vaguely, and shouting their enthusiasm at his safe return. He nodded; mumbling unheard words he moved slowly through the mob toward the place where he had last seen the girl, soon discovering that she had disappeared. His eyes searched the decks and in irritation turned on his heels.

"Dammit, Mr. Cruse, I am not Lazarus returned from the grave! Get them back to work!"

The revelry ceased and the men backed away with sullen looks. The Captain marched the width of the deck as the men quietly opened their ranks to him. He paused at the companionway hatch and cast a dark frown backward, then disappeared below.

"What be wrong with the Capt'n? He's worser'n a bitch in heat."

"It's 'is pretty little lady..."

"More like a bastard in heat t' me." Coarse laughter followed.

"Shet yer mouth, ye want 'im ter hear ye?"

"Ah, I wuz jist havin' a bit o' fun."

The voices moved away. Jamie stood below clenching and unclenching his fists. "It's true," he thought, "damn her soul to hell. All she has to do is twist and my gut ends up like a pretzel. What kind of a hold does that red-headed witch have on me?"

He stormed down the corridor muttering angrily to himself and thrust the door open. It banged against the wall. He slammed it shut and strode across the room to the small cabinet and poured himself a drink. Throwing back his head, he drained the goblet, feeling the bite and warmth move slowly downward. The clink of glass sounded again and he leisurely raised the cup, and as he studied the amber brew turned gradually toward the closed door. Raising the chalice to his lips he contemplated the wooden barrier.

Katy stood at the stern window. She raised the handkerchief to her tear-drenched face and dabbed at the clear droplets that were only now beginning to cease. One ran across her lip and she caught it on her tongue, tasting the salty tang. She pulled the sodden kerchief through her fingers, winding it in and out, then patted at another tear. Her body was tense and straight. Every nerve felt as taut as a violin string and she could almost hear the high pitched note that waited to be plucked.

"That vile wretch," she scoffed to herself, "so sure of himself."

She started and drew herself tighter at the sounds in the cabin beyond. She raised her face heavenward and closed her eyes, refusing to release the tearlets that threatened. Her shoulders and neck muscles protested at the strain.

"Father in heaven, please help me," she whispered. "Strengthen my will." The motions of her hands ceased as did her breathing. The pulse in her head and ears pounded

loudly and she lowered her head and stared at the red velvet covered pillow lying on the gallery seat—and waited.

He stood in the doorway quietly watching her, sipping at the brandy. She didn't move; he bided his time. She swallowed, trying to find saliva to moisten her dry throbbing throat. Her breath came in short, shallow pants. He watched her with narrowed eyes and grim tightened lips and growing impatience. With straight back, bowed head and hands clasped tensely in front she was a sure picture of a praying madonna.

"Is my soul so endangered that you must beseech the heavens continually?" he sneered.

She trembled at the chafing tone of his voice and released a pent-up breath; her throat ached from the constriction.

"Are you deaf, madam, or truly lost in meditation?" He moved across the room.

She forced herself to face him. "It would take an angel to plead your cause, m'lord."

His eyebrow raised and he jutted his lower lip out studying her. "Did I hear a hint of rebellion in your voice, my sweet? Does a few moments of consultation with the heavens fan a small blaze within you?"

"Does it not frighten you to jest at heavenly matters, Captain?" Her voice trembled at her boldness.

His fists found their place on his hips to cease their shaking. His face hardened in loathing. "I have stood in the center of a council of death, made up of prayer-mouthing heretics, clutching their holy beads and hallowed prayer books and spewing forth their godly edicts. I have heard dying, suffering men raise their voices with their last breath begging for release from their misery. In the beginning my prayers joined theirs. I was sure an angel with a blazing sword would appear and wreak righteous destruction upon those Spanish infidels who maimed and tortured in the name of God. I saw men, strong-willed and manly, destroyed—shattered until nothing remained but miserably, abject wretches begging and pleading with whatever's up there," he

flung his hand contemptuously upwards, "for blessed relief, and the only way they received that relief was through death," he paused, his hand found its place on his hip once more, his lips curled in scorn. "It doesn't take a god to kill, madam."

Katy shuddered as the abhorrent words spilled from his mouth. A cruel, barbaric leer crossed his face. "So do not waste your time on prayers in my behalf, my sweet. No one is listening." He drained the cup and returned to the cabinet for a refill.

Katy sat on the gallery seat and took up her sewing. Her hands still shook from the near drowning and from the angry words just spoken. She endeavoured to concentrate on the needlework. She forced her attention to her task as she became aware of his presence. From furtive glances she knew he was changing into dry clothes.

He caught one of her surreptitious glances and grinned wickedly. "Shall I continue to dress, madam, or dare I hope for a pleasant romp on yon bed?"

She snorted angrily and felt the blush upon her cheeks at his crudeness. He threw back his head and laughed. Still chuckling he continued to button his shirt and shortened the distance between them.

Katy stabbed her thumb down on the sharp needle in her agitation and cried out. Putting her thumb in her mouth, she continued to watch him suspiciously. He knelt in front of her and took her wrist. Pulling the digit from her lips, he examined it. With a mocking look in his eyes he kissed it. She tried to release her hand but the hold tightened painfully.

"I only meant to heal the pain."

"You don't know how to heal, only hurt," she whispered. Her heart raced at her own daring.

"And I thought you glad to see me safe."

She watched him with guarded eyes. Aware of his nearness and wary of the control he had over her, she was quite conscious of the hard muscular chest resting against her knees and was sure he could feel the rapid pulse under his

grip. All her strength was needed to keep her emotions in tow and masked.

"I was glad to see you both safe."

"And I was sure we were two good meals for the sharks."

"Sharks!" her voice rose shrilly.

He smiled inwardly. "Aye, sharks. You know those big, ugly fish with those big, ugly teeth that tear a man to pieces and eat a leg, and then an arm and . . ."

"Oh, stop it!" she cried and stood up, releasing his hold on her. She covered her ears with her forearms, locking her hands behind her head. She tried vainly to keep the horrible picture from her mind.

An amused laugh sounded. "Would you care if a shark ate me, Katy?" he asked trying to pull her arms down.

"Oh, leave me alone! I wish a shark would eat you. Only you are so horrible he would probably spit you out again," she wailed.

He tried to draw her close, but she jabbed at him with her elbows. "Leave me alone, please. Don't you know that I hate you?" she cried.

His eyes narrowed and the dark scowl overshadowed his features. With fixed determination he grasped her wrists harshly and forced her arms downward and behind her back. He jerked her closer until her body felt his sinewy limbs against her tender flesh. One large hand grasped her two smaller ones. His free hand seized her roughly behind the head and forced it back. She arched against him. His thumb caressed her throat tenderly. Mockingly, he planted a gentle kiss over the throbbing pulse at the base of her throat, then moved upward. She swallowed and the harsh sound exploded in her ears. He nibbled at her ear and the soft skin beneath her jawbone. She struggled and whimpered, feeling a wave of hopelessness sweep over her.

"Surrender, Katy. Don't keep fighting. The battle is lost. You are mine," he whispered as his moist lips moved upon her.

"Never," she gasped.

"The day will come when that sigh will be from pleasure, not from struggle." His warm breath fluttered against her ear like the touch of the fragile wings of a butterfly.

Tears rose. "I'll die first."

He jerked his head back and looked at her with blazing eyes, "Bitch! That day could be closer than you realize!" In his fury, he threw her on the bed.

She turned her head away and sobbed quietly. Jamie turned away in disgust.

"As many tears as you shed, we could drown aboard ship. Can't you do anything but cry?" he shouted.

She wailed loudly, receiving as much pleasure from defying Jamie as the release she felt of her own pent-up emotions.

"Dammit, will you shut up? Everyone on deck will think I am beating you."

Another loud cry sounded from the bed.

"Oh, hell!" he growled and stamped out of the room, slamming doors as he went.

Smiling, Katy sat up and wiped the tears away. "Where is thy victory now, m'lord?" she muttered satisfied with her triumph.

Katy lay in a half sleep trying to determine what had aroused her. Through the open casements she watched the lightning chase the small threads of quicksilver in and out among the lowhung clouds. Forked tongues of light lifted silently here and there. She moved closer to Jamie and felt the warmth of him reach out and embrace her. He stirred but little as she touched him with hip and thigh. Another quickening of bright illumination lit the heavens, followed by a loud percussion, which rattled its way across the horizon.

She could feel the turmoil of the ocean as the Hawk pitched and rolled with the swelling of the waves. The sails creaked and groaned in the heavy wind. Now voices added to the disturbance. She looked at Jamie; he lay quietly staring

into the night filled room. The soft glow of the lamp caught the glint of midnight-hued eyes. He lay but a moment longer blinking sleep from his eyes and then rose cautiously lest he waken her.

"What's the matter?" she asked, watching him shove his leg into his breeches.

"I didn't mean to awaken you." He hopped on one foot to regain his balance, then pushed the other leg through.

"You didn't, the lightning did."

He sat on the edge of the bed and stamped his boots on. "Sounds like our storm has arrived." Grabbing his shirt he moved quickly across the room and was gone.

Katy lay back in the bed and watched the brilliant display of light dart across the heavens. Somewhere during nature's kaleidoscopic play of fulmination she fell asleep.

Hours later when her eyes opened, her attention was immediately drawn to the stern windows. They were closed now and bolted. The heavy shutters had also been latched. The room was enclosed in a darkened gloom. The lamp glowed bravely but faintly.

Bracing herself against the bed to keep her balance, Katy dressed hurriedly. As the ship rose and fell, she found herself thrown against one wall of the corridor then the other in her struggle to reach the top deck. She pulled herself up the ladder feeling the bump of her hip against the hard wall of the hatch. Her stomach had now assumed the gait of the pitching of the ship. A dull thump in the back of her head began to make itself known. By the time she reached the deck her stomach was churning. She stumbled across the plunging deck; as she was thrown against the gunwale a strong hand reached out and grabbed her around the waist.

"Ye all right, miss?" he yelled in her ear. A young face with great drops of water and salt clinging to lashes and beard fell within her vision.

"Yes, I think so," she shouted in return.

"Ye mustn't be on deck, ye'll be washed overboard." A cape heavily coated with whale's oil covered most of his clothing keeping them dry. The salt coating his beard

glistered like a hoary frost she noticed before her full attention was directed to the heaving sea.

"I'll take y' back to the companionway," he shouted.

She shook her head and put her hand over her mouth and pointed to the railing.

"Can ye make it back by yerself?"

She nodded her reply to him and he helped her to the railing, then reluctantly left. Katy found she could no longer control her nausea and opened her mouth and let the sea receive the sour offering. The wind whipped around her; the rain and waves added their torment and she soon found herself soaked to the skin. She felt weak from the overwhelming turmoil that contended inside her heaving stomach.

Her eyes followed the rise and descent of the ship. The waves crested at a towering height and the bowsprit sliced through the soaring liquid mounds. She clung to the railing desperately, feeling the grasping liquified fingers jerking at her drenched clothing and person. She could feel her hold on the rail slipping and terror gripped her. She opened her mouth to scream and the mountain of water rushed to fill the cavity. Swallowing, she tasted the briny bite and felt her stomach lurch again. Taking a firmer hold on the rail she watched the Hawk aspire to the giddy rampart above. When the brave galleon topped the great wave she seemed to hover there.

Katy's heart failed her. Looking out over the vast panorama she could see the spiring waves stretched out as far as vision allowed. The whole ocean was a raging maelstrom and she was in the center of it. As the ship nodded to its fall she let go of the rail and started for the hatch. She stumbled as a wave crashed upon her and bore her to the deck. Her fingers clawed at the smooth flooring beneath, then she felt herself buoyed upward on the crest of the receding wave. She tried to scream, but once more was prevented by the angry water and high winds. Just as she was about to give up in sheer desperation, a strong, steely arm clasped her waist and

drew her close. As the welcoming embrace of oblivion closed about her she muttered, "Jamie."

As Katy rose on the heaving wave she tried to protest loudly, but her cry of distress emerged as a soft mewling sound. She felt the pitch and roll of the Hawk and her terror grew. She tossed back and forth on the soft wave. The wail of the wind had softened to a deep murmur which calmed her agitated heart. The deep murmur became the quieting voice of the Captain and Katy tried to roll off the rising crest but something was holding her in a vise-tight grip and refused to release her.

"Katy, Katy," the haunting voice came from a foggy distance.

With great effort she opened her eyes. A large shape appeared vaguely in the misty veil that surrounded her. Slowly the shape took form and she stared at him blankly at first, then the remembrance of the horror on deck returned and she struggled to rise.

"Katy, stop it!" The captain gave her a firm shake and she quieted.

Her hands reached up and grasped his forearms. The strength of them gave her a strong sense of security which she desperately needed and she ran her hands up and down the length of them.

Tears gathered on the fringe of her lashes and clung there. "Oh, Jamie, I was so frightened. The wave—I felt myself being pulled into the sea. I would have drowned but for you." She shuddered at the horrendous thought. "Hold me, Jamie, please hold me."

His arms pulled her closely. "Katy, do not be afraid. It is all over now. I won't let anything happen to you. Sh-h, don't cry now."

His breath was warm against her ear and she lay contented in his arms. She marveled at his tenderness. For once he seemed to be thinking of her needs only. She snuggled closer to him and buried her face against the furry

mat on his chest. It felt so good to feel warm and secure; she could feel the mantle of sleep slowly wrapping around her.

At her first touch Jamie had gasped as he felt a spark being kindled, then when her face had found its place against his chest the spark had ignited into a warm flame. He frowned at the unfamiliar feelings slowly pulsating through him. It seemed right that he should be holding her in his arms. They were a perfect fit for that petite, lovely creature they enclosed, for wasn't she his by every recognizable law of possession? He would never let her go. Nothing would take her away from him, whether the forces be of God or man, he would fight them all. One day she would know that she was his and his alone.

He heard her give a contented sigh and her head fell forward in sleep. He eased her back onto the pillow. Her drying hair billowed like a flaming plumage around her head. The creamy skin and faultless beauty would put a master painter's brush to shame. Jamie knew that he possessed an exquisite jewel but he knew not how to hold it, whether gently or firmly. He knew naught about obtaining the warmth that dwelt therein, whether to approach closely or from a distance. This unique gem fascinated and unnerved him. If only he could find the way to reach her unreachable heart.

Jamie pulled the coverlet higher and ran his hand across the smooth, rounded shoulder. He shuddered every time he thought how close he had come to losing her. The huge wave had picked her up like a lover and was eagerly bearing her to its watery embrace. It had been only with force and sheer determination he had thwarted that union. As he carried Katy below she had neither spoken nor given any indication of life. Her flesh had felt cold and lifeless, the honey-sweet lips had taken on a blue cast. He had hurriedly torn her cold, drenched clothes from her and laid his head against her chest and listened. Faintly, slowly the sound had whispered in his ear. Grabbing the quilt he had covered her and tucked it tightly around her. Not knowing where Billy kept the linens

he had searched frantically for something else to throw over her. Ripping his own wet clothes off, he had crawled in bed beside her and had held her, wrapping legs and arms about her, until his warmth had renewed the pink blush in her lips and cheeks and the touch of her body gave a glow of its own. Reluctantly he had risen and pulled on dry breeches. Reaching for his shirt, she had begun to moan and struggle in her reawakening and he had gently held her down lest she fall from the bed and injure herself. He had tried to reassure her that everything was all right but she had continued to grapple with him as cries of fear and dismay had tumbled from her lips. Now that she peacefully slept he left to seek Billy and return to his duty topside.

When Katy awoke the ship still rose and fell with a vengeance and the winds continued to buffet the ship viciously. Soon her stomach followed the climb and plunge with the same vehemence and her head pounded with the same fury. She knew the inevitable was upon her and, struggling to her feet, she hurried across the floor to the privacy of the screened chamber pot.

Finally she returned to her place of repose. Never had she been so ill before. She felt she was surely going to die; it was just a matter of when that hour might arrive.

Jamie entered and thinking Katy asleep moved around on silent feet changing into dry clothes. When he turned to her she lay watching him with distraught eyes.

He chuckled softly. "You are wearing a lovely colour today, madam. Pea-green I believe they call it."

"You brute. I think I shall die any moment and you find that amusing," she snapped.

He swooped her up in his arms. She scowled at the continued mirth. "You are correct, my sweet. I am a brute to find amusement at your plight. Seasickness is something I rarely see among my crew and it has laid its mark heavily upon you."

She pushed against his chest. "I am not one of your crew, Captain."

He lay her down on the feathery pallet and his eyes swept over her from head to toe. The shirt revealed a flash of slender, white legs. One button was unhooked and gapped at her bosom vaguely hinting of the tempting delight beneath.

"Of that I am well aware, madam, and very grateful," he told her softly bending over her, placing an arm on either side of the slender frame. His eyes held hers in a forceful way, she felt the blush creep across her face. His knuckles lightly brushed the length of her jawbone.

"I'll send Billy in with a cup of strong tea. It should help to settle your stomach."

The storm had somewhat abated and the shutters on the stern gallery had been removed. Katy's eyes were drawn to the windows as is iron to a magnet. The Hawk still mounted the cresting waves and rode upon them with a voluptuous sensual enjoyment. The soaring whitecaps appeared to await the abuse of the assaulting ship as it plunged its way through the foamy waters. The sky was still full of the dark angry clouds and the rain continued to fall in huge drops. The wind steadily moaned soulfully through the shortened sails.

A knock sounded. "Come in, Billy."

He entered bearing a tray and set it upon the table beside the bed. Katy saw it contained a teapot, cup and saucer and a reed strainer.

"The Capt'n said ye be under the weather, mum, with the seasickness. A cup o' tea will fix ye up in no time." His grey eyes matched the glum look on his face.

Billy poured the steaming tea through the strainer then handed Katy the filled cup and a saucer. She set the plate upon her stomach and blew at the vapour slowly rising from the cup.

"I'm feeling better now."

A grin cast the gloomy expression aside.

Katy sipped at the strong black brew. Her throat burned and eyes teared as the burning tea slid down, biting and warming as it descended. She turned filled eyes upon him.

"What have you done to the tea?" she gasped.

"Brandy, mum. The Capt'n said t' lace it with brandy."

"Brandy!" She released a sigh of exasperation. "Oh, yes, he would, wouldn't he? The favourite cure-all."

"Drink it, mum, it will make ye feel better."

"Throw it out, Billy, and bring me some tea."

"But the Capt'n—"

"Then let the Captain drink it. I'll drink nothing but tea."

Billy sighed. "Yes, miss." Gathering up the rejected cup and tray, he left.

As the day wore on the gale grew weaker. The sea calmed as if a soothing hand had touched it and eased its churning anger. The dark clouds dissipated and a small hopeful patch of azure appeared and grew little by little.

Katy was up and sitting in the gallery seat when Jamie came in for a much needed rest. Billy followed with a light snack and coffee for the Captain and a pot of tea for Katy. Try as she might Katy could not get used to the bitterness of the black cup the crew called jamoke or java. She still preferred the refined English brew.

Jamie stood beside her and leaned forward. As he bent over her Katy observed the dark circles under his tired, red-rimmed eyes and his haggard countenance. She fought the impulse to put her hand on his arm and offer him an encouraging smile as he extended his hand to lean against the window sill.

He gazed out of the window, "A good sign the gale has broken," he pointed to the patch of blue breaking through the clouds. "Dutchman's breeches."

Looking up at him, she frowned, "Dutchman's breeches?"

He grinned, "No matter how small the patch nor how large, sailors always say it is enough to make a pair of breeches for a Dutchman."

His hand moved and covered her thigh. The muscles tensed beneath his touch, "I believe your tea is ready, madam," his grin widened at her discomfort, then he released his hold.

As he walked to the bedside table where Billy had laid his

lunch out for him, he stretched his arms over his head and emitted a groan of relief. Putting his hands on his hips, he twisted and turned his body to ease the aching muscles which plagued him.

"God, what a storm. Glad it is over. That was some performance the old girl gave, aye Billy?"

"Aye, sir. She's a grand lady, sir."

Puzzled, Katy asked, "She? Who?"

Jamie laughed, "The Hawk. Anything that sails the sea is always referred to in the feminine gender, my dear."

"With a name like Hawk and as huge as this boat is you would think it would be referred to in the masculine gender," Katy responded tartly.

At the word 'boat' the captain and Billy shuddered.

"Please, madam, the dinghy is a boat. The Hawk is a ship."

"Boat or ship, what is the difference?" Katy waved her hand irritably at the rebuke.

"Ah, the difference, mum, is great. What kin I be tellin' ye about a wee boat like a dinghy? But a ship like the Hawk..." Billy's voice trailed off in admiration. "The Hawk is a reconverted man-o'-war, a former vessel o' the Royal Navy. The Capt'n bought 'er from Sir John Stuart, a member o' the Admiralty. Where he got it only he and the good Lord knows and the Capt'n weren't askin' any questions, were ye, sir?"

Jamie looked up from his lunch and grinned, "Carry on, Billy, you are the one who is telling this tale."

"Aye, sir. Anyhows, she's considered in the third-rated class o' ships and a brigatine. She has two full decks and the quarter-deck."

"Two full decks?" Katy asked perplexed.

"Aye. Ye have never been below, mum. The crew quarters there. 'Tis there we carry the stores and galley, the magazine and everything necessary to keep 'er ship-shape."

"We also carry odours which are unsuitable for a young lady's delicate nature. Namely, the bilge gathers a rather crude odour—not to mention the head—or necessary as it is

called on land. Below deck is definitely not within your domain.—Unless you would like to be at the tender mercy of my lusty crew.” He eyed her while an embarrassed silence prevailed, then Billy cleared his throat to regain Katy’s attention.

“If the Capt’n kept a crew t’ run the Hawk like the Royal Navy does, we would be carryin’ at least four hundred ’n’ ninety men and we could be carryin’ up to seven hundred an’ twenty. We make do with about two hundred men. Which jist goes to show ye what a good crew kin do.”

“Two hundred? I haven’t seen that many...”

“We run four watches aboard the Hawk, Katy. They sleep and eat accordingly. Only about seventy five or eighty are on deck at one time. Continue your verbal tour, Billy.”

“Let’s see, what have I missed?—Oh, yes, the length of ’er is two hundred ’n’ twenty six feet and ’er beam is fifty one. Her weight be about thirty five hundred tons. We carry sixty-four cannon; twelve pounders to thirty two pounders. A bonny ship, lass, a grand lady.”

“You are beginning to sound like a land locked sailor yearning for the open sea, Billy.”

He nodded in agreement. “Ye see, sir, it’s jist that—sometimes when I’m topside—me fingers—well, they sorta itch to mend a sail... or to secure a line—”

The Captain leaned back in the chair and observed the man narrowly, then in a tight voice replied, “If memory serves me well, sir, those duties fail to meet the terms of our—agreement.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Then I suggest that each of us be content with our positions while on board this ship and cease trying to make unnecessary changes.”

From the corner of his eye Billy saw Katy drop her eyes to stare at her tightly clenched hands. His mouth twitched angrily, “Aye, sir.”

The steaming water awaited her pleasure. Both cabins

stood empty. The goings and comings of the first mate seeking the orders of the day had ceased, as had the duties of Billy in his role as the Captain's manservant. Katy thought she would never be left to her own solitude, but at last she was alone. Only then would she allow herself to remember the depressing morning.

The day had dawned dismal and wet, the rain descending lazily in a dreary mist. Jamie's disposition had mirrored the day. He had stamped about the cabin complaining angrily. The few comments Katy had ventured brought sharp, biting retorts from him. She had wrapped herself tightly in one of his robes and sat in the stern gallery, chin braced on a fist against her knee watching him out of timid eyes.

Even that had angered him. His eyes fell on her small, huddled figure. "God's eyes, girl, must you sit over there like a quaking lily-livered fool? Billy will think I beat you everytime I pass you." He paused, "I haven't raised a hand to you—yet." His enraged eyes lingered on her but a few seconds before dismissing her.

"Billy, are you ready with that razor yet? You're slower than an old woman this morning."

The servant appeared at the door with all his shaving paraphernalia on a tray. "If ye'll be takin' a seat, Capt'n, we kin begin," he told his master undaunted, wrapping a towel around Jamie's shoulders. Taking up the shaving brush, he whipped the soap in the mug into a soft, creamy lather, then placed a hot towel over the lower part of Jamie's face. Grasping the straight-edged razor, he began to hone the blade across the leather strap which he had attached to the chair.

"My bath water was nearly cold this morning," Jamie complained, his voice muffled in the towel.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"As was my breakfast," the Captain added coldly.

"I'll be tellin' Baker, sir."

"Tell him I do not want it to happen again."

"Aye, sir."

"I have boiled enough, get on with the shaving," he said impatiently, jerking the towel away from his face.

Billy proceeded to lather the Captain's face. Jamie sat with closed eyes, his head leaning against the padded back of the chair. Billy drew the sharpened blade across his cheek.

Katy could hear the blade scraping against the sharp bristles. The skin on her face and throat tingled as she remembered the whiskers prickling across the tender parts of her body the night before. She raised her hand to her jaw and rubbed it gently on the back of her hand. She felt his eyes on her and looked at him. The white lathered face smirked back at her and his dark eyes were filled with scornful amusement as if he could read her thoughts.

She gave him a contemptuous look and turned her attention to the gloomy sea. White caps topped the blue-green waves as they beat against the hull of the ship.

"Can't you work a little faster, Billy?" he growled impatiently.

"If ye be wantin' t' bleed a little, I can."

"Just hurry."

She forced herself not to look at him. She could hear Billy's movements as he hurried to obey the Captain. Soon Jamie's booted feet moved to the door. Still she willed her eyes to seek the sea. The door closed and she arose from the window.

Billy worked in silence as he gathered his shaving effects together and took them into the exterior room. Then as Katy wandered aimlessly about he emptied Jamie's cold bath water out the stern window.

"I'll be bringin' the water in fer ye now, mum."

"Thank you, Billy."

Now the cabin was finally empty and quiet. She untied the belt that held the robe wrapped tightly around her. As she did so, she caught her reflection in the mirror. Giggling softly, her hand came to her mouth to suppress the mirth at her mirrored appearance. The shoulders of the robe fell almost to her elbows and the long sleeves were enwrapped

into large, uneven bulges reminding her of large, bumpy rolls of sausages. She stumbled over the hem of the robe as she walked, yet she knew the edge of the garment had only hit Jamie at his knees, the few times he had chosen to wear it.

She dropped it to the floor. Her eyes sought the mirror once more. The shirt she wore was trimmed in luxuriant, ruffled lace at the wrists and down the front. The material felt soft and silken to the touch. The buttons shimmered with an opalescent glow. When she had unbuttoned the last one the shirt dropped beside the robe.

Katy bound her hair with a white silk ribbon and fastened it atop her head. Loosened strands hung in curly tendrils around her ears and against her neck. She walked to the screened tub; sighing contentedly, she lowered herself into the steamy water.

Katy didn't know how long she had lain resting and relaxing in the tranquil bath, except that now the water was cooling and her body felt a slight chill. Bathing hurriedly and stepping from the tub, she walked toward the chest toweling herself. Stopping in front of the mirror, she looked at the image critically. She turned from side to side appraising herself closely. Having no one with whom to compare the slim yet curvaceous figure, she could come to no conclusion as to her beauty.

A low derisive laugh came from behind her and she froze. The towel was draped low around her buttocks, held by her now clenched hands. Her eyes sought the source of the ridicule in the mirror, even though all alerted senses knew the identity of the scoffer. A look of shocked surprise still lingered on her face.

"Have you decided whether you approve or disapprove of the merchandise yet?" he inquired tauntingly.

She whirled facing the bed. He lay stretched out full length upon it. His arms were folded behind his head, elevating it so he could observe her in comfort.

She covered herself quickly with the towel. "You!

How—when did you come back?"

"While you were bathing. I thought you were going to stay in there the rest of the day." His voice was tinged with amusement. "There was nothing imperative enough to require my attention topside, so I sought to ascertain whether the same situation existed here also. You appear to have a problem, my sweet, perhaps I could help you to solve it."

They eyed one another. He with disdain and rising desire, she with distrust. She felt a tremble shake her from head to heels as he continued to inspect her. A faint smile pulled at the corner of his mouth.

"Come here," he commanded in a whisper.

She shook her head, her eyes widened at the ruthlessness in the quiet tones. Of their own accord, her feet moved backward one step at a time.

His eyes narrowed menacingly. "Come here," he spoke but a little louder, yet it seemed to thunder in her ears.

She shook her head slowly; anxiety parched her throat and she tried to swallow.

"Would you rather I came after you?" he threatened.

Katy moved on wooden legs. No sound escaped her. She stood at the side of the bed, towel clutched tightly around her. His hand suddenly shot out and seized it, ripping it from around her and out of her hands.

"Didn't you approve of what you saw, my dear? Or don't you recognise perfection when you see it?" His eyes traveled slowly over her body, touching each intimate place with invisible fingers. Katy longed to cover herself from his devouring glower. Her eyes unconsciously watched the change taking place within the confines of the tight breeches. A chill shook her.

"I think you had better join me before you catch your death from a chill."

"I'm not—not cold," she whispered hoarsely, her throat strained as she forced the words out.

"Of course you are, my sweet; you are trembling." He laughed lightly. "Get in," he commanded holding the quilt up.

Reluctantly, Katy slipped beneath the coverlet quickly and pulled it up under her chin, keeping her eyes straight ahead. He stood beside the bed and undressed, then slid beneath the covering also. Moving toward her his arm slipped around her waist. The tensed muscles felt like metal bands around her middle as he pulled her against him. As on the previous night, once more his body molded itself against hers and as before his flesh seemed to smolder and burn with an inward fever, scorching hers. His roving hands sought each secret place.

She uttered a soft whimper and struck out at the offending explorer. "No, no," she pleaded as she struggled against him.

Her silken flesh quailed under his questing hand. "If you would relax, we could both enjoy ourselves. It won't do you any good to fight me, my sweet. Now stop struggling and enjoy the moment."

Jamie's mouth tasted the sweetness of round, firm mounds and the taut peaks of rose-tipped buds and moved down to explore the flat, quivering belly and depression dwelling there, then retraced his path upward again. His lips sought hers. Katy clamped her teeth tightly, refusing him the pleasure of her mouth. Her body tensed with apprehension, knowing the inevitable end.

"Relax," he whispered against her cheek. She shook her head and he felt her body quiver in repulsion.

His arm tightened around her again, Katy's ribs felt as if they might break. "Submit, my sweet, you must see it will be better for both of us in the end."

His lips captured her mouth and parted her lips. His mouth feasted upon hers, stripping her of all resistance and Katy was horrified to find her mouth responding impetuously. A low laugh of triumph sounded in his throat.

With an angry cry, she pushed away from him, struggling

to release his hold on her. Another laugh broke deep in his throat as he clutched her flailing hands. Jamie pulled her up against his chest, holding her tightly. Resistance was impossible, for her arms were now imprisoned against his relentless torso. His hold tightened around her and he jerked her against him roughly. Katy gasped with surprise and pain.

"Submit, wench! There is but one purpose for your presence here and that is for my gratification," he whispered hoarsely. "It will do you no good to struggle. Not only is my strength greater than yours, but my will also. And as of this moment, so is my desire, but one day your need will burn inside you as mine does. This I promise you."

"Never," she sobbed, "I hate you, I hate you."

She could feel the hardness of him throbbing against her thigh and his mouth traveled a familiar pathway across her frigid body. She knew resistance was futile. As she lay quiet and submissive, he caressed her with his probing hands and brutish mouth. With eyes tightly closed, Katy tried to erase from her mind the degradation forced upon her.

Then she felt her body pressed downward into the soft down as his body covered hers. His hands forced her legs open and Katy felt his hardened manhood inside her. He thrust at her gently, caressing her face and hair with his lips, murmuring her name softly against her cheek. His breathing quickened as did the movement of his plunging hips as he thrust deeper and deeper inside her. Katy held back the cries of pain and remorse echoing in her anguished heart.

She released a sigh of relief when he at last withdrew the appendage of torture. She quickly turned away from him and drew the quilt tightly around her and sobbed convulsively.

Jamie lay looking at her bared back perplexed, then in anger. Each time he took her it followed the same pattern: first the struggle, then the frigid submission and finally the tears. Would it never change? Each time he swore it would be the last, but he would see her or think of her and his feet would hasten to his cabin and the next thing he knew he

would be struggling again to appease the hunger for her that tingled and burned within him constantly. What was the matter with him? What was the insane infatuation which possessed him? With a disgusted snort he thrust himself from the bed and dressed, slamming the door as he left.

The captain leaned over the railing and watched the sea morosely. Low curses escaped and fled across the waters on the silent breezes.

"Damn! No woman is worth all this addle-pated idiocy. I might as well try to set the Thames on fire as to believe she will ever change. Why can't I get it through my head that she hates me?"

He paced the deck muttering to himself, his fingers unconsciously finding a path through his hair in agitation. Stopping at the gunwale he brought his fist down sharply atop the railing. The pain rushed upward and a stinging numbness crept through the tightly drawn fist.

"You thick-headed, shallow-brained fool! She is only a woman—a lying, scheming, conniving female. Bought and paid for in hard coin."

A silent voice reminded him that Katy wasn't the female the hard coin had purchased.

He shook his head violently. "No matter! One female is worth as much as the next. Is it my fault Billy brought the wrong girl aboard? Did I have anything to do with the plot in the first place? Is it my fault she did not speak up and let me know that she was the wrong girl, instead of standing there like a tongue-tied idiot? No, by damn! The fault does not lie with me. I am free of any wrong in the matter. No, by God's truth, I am free, I share no blame." He reiterated, trying to convince himself of his innocence.

"God's thirst, I need a drink," he muttered. Turning, he started for the companion hatch, then stopped, deciding he would rather not go below for the moment—the drink could wait.

From that time on there was no doubt left in Katy's mind as to her function in his life, he had made that purpose

perfectly clear. She knew she could delude herself no longer. She engraved the names on the doorway to her heart. Doxy! Slut! Whore! She knew not whom she hated the more, him or herself. Herself because little by little she knew she was falling in love with the indomitable captain.

Her high ideals and resolves were crumbling around her and she was finding it almost impossible to be frigid and haughty toward him. Sometimes it took all her strength to keep from falling into his arms if he but touched her.

He seemed not to notice any change in her at all. His face was masked always now with the dark, fearsome scowl and unyielding eyes. The only thing warm about him when he was with her was his ardour. His demeanour remained cold even during the heat of passion. Yet she knew him to be warm and amicable to his comrades, for his laughter rang above the revelry of the others, when he sought the companionship of the crew.

It seemed his coldness toward her grew from day to day. She scampered out of his way if he approached her and this infuriated him. His tongue would lash out at her like a whip. The inward fear of him grew until she trembled if he but entered the room. She knew little about men, and understanding the frustrations which boiled within this one was beyond her experience.

Jamie had never felt the uncontrollable desire for another that he felt towards this frightened, unresponsive woman who now occupied the same cabin and bed as he. When his ardour inflamed and he sought her out, it infuriated him to see the terror which embraced her. He had never had to force himself on a woman before. They seemed quite willing, indeed, eager to proffer their ripe, tender bodies to his passions.

This small creature made him feel like a savage brute and the deed always seemed to end up as an act of rape. He was determined to cause her to yearn for him as much as he craved her. His sexual appetite appeared to be ravenous and unappeasable, no matter how many times he took her.

He couldn't understand the growing feeling of dissatisfaction and unrest which consumed him. Nothing satisfied him. The more the crew or Billy, and yea, even the girl tried to please him, the more sullen and malcontent he became.

Chapter 5

The day was sunny and warm. The Captain felt contented and relaxed for the first time in days. Mr. Cruse and he had bantered back and forth all morning. A sense of relief and complacency had invaded the ship and everyone was enjoying the pleasant feeling. The crew watched the Captain and was delighted to see that he had thrown over the dysphoric emotions which had surrounded him for days. Smiles crossed their faces as they nodded to one another when he threw back his head and released a hearty laugh.

Jamie joined in the chorus of the song which rose boisterously from below:

Begotten in the galley and born under a gun,
Every hair a rope yarn, every tooth a marlin spike,
Every finger a fish hook and in his blood right good
Stockholm tar.

The crew laughed their delight and threw coarse jokes back and forth from the maindeck to the quarterdeck. The morning passed with an almost festive attitude. The Captain leisurely leaned against the gunwale. His eyes wandered slowly and possessively over the deck below; the men worked contentedly at their chores, laughing and talking as they laboured. The metal of the polished cannons glinted in the bright rays of the afternoon sun. The gleaming presages of death mocked the lively camaraderie aboard the great vessel. Huge ells of canvas were spread out widely and the crew sat crosslegged stitching the rents the gale had slashed in the heavy sails as the Hawk had valiantly met the fury of the vicious spring storm. Other busy tars were splashing large buckets of salt water across the decks to wash away the fine sawdust left behind by the scouring holystones.

The Captain's eyes narrowed and darkened as they rested upon the girl. She had just come on deck and already stood surrounded by five or six of the crew, laughing and flirting with each one of them. Resentment surged through him.

He watched her tilt her head downward and regard them coyly as her smile widened, exposing dimpled cheeks and milk white teeth. There was no fear in her now, indeed, she appeared quite relaxed and perceiving the enjoyment of the enraptured attention she was receiving; he bristled.

One of the men said something to her and was rewarded by a captivating laugh. Her laughter echoed across the deck in an enchanting peal. The crew grinned at one another and turned their sole attention on the lovely enchantress.

A growl escaped Jamie's throat. Mr. Cruse tensed. He had stood to one side watching the Captain as he had kept a close eye on the girl. The first mate had marked the change come over the irate man.

Once again her laughter pealed across the deck and Jamie pushed himself away from the rail. "Damned slut!" He slammed his hard fist into his open palm. "Next thing we will have to put down a mutiny because of her!"

Katy's head was thrown back in carefree abandon. The

golden fingers of the sun caressed the white silken throat exposed to their avid warmth and touched the flaming tresses which hung loosely around the somber, pearl white mantua she wore. Every eye watching drank in the intoxicating beauty of her.

Suddenly the laughter died in her throat as her joy-filled eyes fell upon the figure leaning over the quarterdeck railing.

The men quickly found their way back to their chores. Katy's feet were frozen to the deck. She willed herself to seek the safety of the cabin below, but her body refused to move. She watched him stamp down the steps toward her. His large hand clamped around her wrist and she nearly stumbled and fell down the companionway as he dragged her behind him.

Shoving the door of his cabin open, he yanked her into the bedroom. She screamed as he slung her across the room. Her feet left the floor from the force of the propulsion and she landed against the bottom of the bed. Stunned by the blow, faintly, she could see him stamping angrily toward her. Small squeaks of fear issued from her constricted throat as she tried to scurry out of his way. He reached down and dragged her to her feet.

She went limp with terror. She could see and hear everything going on around her, but the ferocious display of jealousy seemed to paralyse her. She could neither move nor speak.

"You conniving Jezebel!" he shouted, throwing her against the bed, "I told you once before to stay away from the crew. I will not have you disrupting the routine of my ship! If you want to continue to enjoy the pleasure of your pallet—*leave my crew alone!*" His heavy booted footfalls retraced the path out of the room. The bedroom door banged shut as he went out. The cabin door resounded a second later.

Katy slid from her precarious perch slowly and lay huddled on the floor. Her body shook as if from the ague. She was too frightened at the moment to do anything but lie quaking; later the tears would come.

Later Billy knocked on the door bringing Katy a pot of tea. As he stood awaiting the invitation to enter he could hear sobbing. He knocked softly again, but there was no answer. Opening the door a crack, he looked in. Katy was lying across the bed crying hysterically. Billy started to back away, then changed his mind and entered.

"Mistress, what is it?"

The crying ceased abruptly. Pushing back her hair she viewed Billy through red, swollen eyes. "Go away."

"Do ye hurt? Shall I be callin' the Capt'n, mum?" he turned to do so.

"No, oh please, no." The protest carried the hint of fear. Sitting up, she wiped the tears away with the back of her hand.

"Can I help ye?"

"No one can help me, not even myself."

He rubbed his hands together in agitation. "There must be somethin' t' do."

"You told me he was not cruel. Well, maybe not to you—" she sobbed.

"He beat ye?" Billy asked in amazement.

"Nay, I almost wish he would. The marks he leaves are on my heart. What is wrong with me, Billy? He is so despicable."

Billy pondered this. He could not understand the Captain's treatment of the young lass. Around her he felt like a piece of clay which she could mold as she desired. He had never felt that way toward any other woman. Resentment fermented in his breast at the shabby treatment given the beautiful, fragile colleen by his master. Yet loyalty for his Captain still gripped him. He felt torn apart by conflicting affections.

"Yes, I can see the change in 'im. Even the crew is complainin'." He paused and looked at her. "How do y' treat 'im?"

"Me? Why?" She felt the blood rising to her face.

"Not meanin' t' hurt yer feelin's, mum. But it seems on watchin' the two of ye together, one is as cold as t'other."

She turned away from him angrily, not wanting to admit that he spoke the truth.

"He loves ye, ye know," Billy told her softly.

She tossed her head in disbelief and released an impatient snort. "Love! He doesn't even know what love is; lust it may be, but not love."

"Sometimes men do get the two confused. But he does love ye."

She scoffed at him once more. "He certainly has an odd way of showing it."

"I believe ye love the Capt'n," he told her quietly.

"*Me*-love *him*? I would rather be dead!" She dropped her eyes, unable to meet his.

"Nay, my lady, I don't believe that."

She paused, trying to control the tears that strained at her eyes. "Sometimes I despise him so much I can't bear to remain in the same room with him. Then other times, I love him so much—" The tears streamed down her face and she rubbed her hands together in anguish. "Oh, Billy, what can I do?"

"Tell 'im. I'm athinkin' things would be different between ye."

"Why can't he tell me first? Why must I always be the one to give?"

"A man's pride be a fragile thing and is in need of being bolstered up by a woman continually. A woman tore the Capt'n's down, now it must be rebuilt. Are ye woman enough to do it, my lady?"

That afternoon Jamie joined her for a late lunch. They were both quiet and subdued. The atmosphere felt heavy, and little conversation passed between them. Katy waited for some form of apology, but an invisible wall of icy constraint separated them. Billy made several comments of interest as he served the food, but finally he too fell silent. When the meal was over, he excused himself and left.

Jamie sat and eyed her with an air of hesitation and

indécision. Katy noted even his wine had gone untouched, nor had he asked for his regular after meal brandy. She kept her head bowed and her eyes lowered, not wanting to meet the cold derisive glare she knew she would find in the dark gaze resting upon her.

Jamie rose, then stood behind her chair. Looking down on her, his hand unconsciously moved to touch her hair. He drew it back quickly. She looked up at him questioningly. For one fleeting moment she thought she had seen a look of tenderness cross his face. His eyes had softened and she thought she had experienced an almost visual caress. An embarrassed smile flickered across his face, then all was quickly hidden behind a scowl. Gently he pulled the chair out from the table and as she arose he took her hand. She held back when he started for the bedroom.

"Come with me—please," he said softly, "I have a surprise for you."

He led her over to the large coffer. The top of the chest opened upon thick, leather hinges, with drawers in the bottom where he kept his clothes. She was fascinated as he drew one gorgeous gown after another out of the top of the chest and held them up against himself. She bit her lip to keep from giggling. He was very sober and serious looking as he passed from one beautiful gown to another, holding each one before him, watching her expression.

Finally he found one that appeared to suit him and turned to her smiling. The smile softened the familiar rigid expression and ended in a deep depression in his right cheek. Her heart fluttered at the unexpected and abrupt change. She couldn't decide which was the most beautiful, the transformed Jamie or the gown.

"You don't like it." The disappointment cut through her musings.

"Oh, Jamie, it's beautiful." She grabbed the gown out of his hands and ran to the mirror. Holding it up in front of her she twisted and turned. Her eyes danced with happiness and excitement. The dark green velvet felt like a gentle caress as it

touched her. The skirt was wide and full, the bodice décolleté and trimmed with pearls. The long, puffed sleeves were slashed to reveal the gauze under-chemise. Pearls criss-crossed to hold the sleeve together.

He watched her with the unknown and captivating smile of his. "Would you like the rest of the ensemble?"

She ran to him, reminding him of an excited child. "Oh, yes, please."

He examined garment after garment, choosing only the most exquisite ones. The petticoat was layer after layer of the most delicate lace she had ever seen, the shift of the finest batiste and nearly transparent. She raised her eyes to his as he laid it in her arms. There was only the slightest hint of a smile at the corner of his mouth but his eyes revealed his amusement at her discomfort. He laid the stockings and slippers on top of the shift.

She backed away from him subdued at the quiet between them. As she faced the mirror and held each piece of clothing, except the shift, in front of her she soon lost the sober attitude and once more became the excited child. He stood with folded arms watching her, a fond smile tugged at his mouth. She ran to him and laughingly threw herself into his arms.

"Thank you, oh, thank you, so much," she told him breathlessly. "They are the most beautiful clothes I have ever seen in my life."

His arms enfolded her and she closed her eyes and took a deep breath as he pulled her to him. His lips moved across her cheek.

"Is the giver to go without a gift in return, my sweet?" he whispered in her ear.

Startled, she looked up at him for he had never asked for her favours before. His lips sought hers and moved upon them, gently seeking some sign of warmth. Blood surged to her head and pounded in her ears. Her hands slowly moved up his arms and across his shoulders, then faltered for a split moment before clasping around the back of his head. She felt

weak and lightheaded and felt herself go limp against him. He smiled at her tenderly, then picking her up, carried her to the bed. This time there was no embarrassment nor tears of anger and remorse. This time she returned kiss for kiss, emotion for emotion, passion for passion.

Later she lay in his arms fulfilled. Happiness flowed through her and the feeling was overwhelming. She would have been content to lie there forever, but she could feel the restlessness in him. She looked at him questioningly.

"I should be on deck." He saw disappointment cloud the shining emerald eyes and felt elated. Never would he understand women. He would never have thought giving this beautiful creature a dress would stimulate such warm emotions. Had he realised that hidden secret before he would have flooded her with gifts, he thought. He promised himself to remember this lesson.

"I only stayed to take you on deck. The crew will be wondering what is taking us so long." He whispered as he ran his lips down her throat and planted a kiss over the throbbing pulse.

Her face flamed at the thought of so many knowing and whispering about her relationship with the Captain.

He smiled down at her. "You are the only woman I have ever known who blushes and means it. God, you are like a fever in my blood. The more I possess you the more I desire you. I hope I never find the cure." He kissed her in his demanding way, his lips sapping all her will and strength.

After he left she lay thinking about the two incidents which had changed her life. She shuddered at the thought of Lord Percy with his soft, pudgy, and pawing hands and the revulsion she had felt toward him, even though he had had the same thoughts and lusts that Jamie had. She forced the terrible results of that incident deep into the recesses of her mind.

Blushing, she remembered Jamie's strong, rough hands caressing her body, and his lips, tender one moment and harsh the next, moving over her, firing her to heights she

never knew existed. She closed her eyes remembering those flaming moments, refusing to recognise that those same moments were built on carnal desire.

She straightened the bed, hoping Billy would not be any the wiser. It was disconcerting to know so many men were probably whispering and conjecturing among themselves all the time about the Captain's doxy.

She poured water into the basin and bathed. She touched the perfume Jamie had given her behind her ears, down her throat, between her breasts and at the bends of her arms, enjoying the heady fragrance which invaded her nostrils.

Picking up the shift, she stepped into it. The soft material caressed her. She pulled the bodice up over her bosom lacing it tightly, forcing her breasts upward. She looked into the mirror and her eyes widened. The diaphanous material left nothing to the imagination; the high curves of her bosom pushed impertinently up through the mist which surrounded her. The garment clung to her as if it were a second skin. She envisioned Jamie's lust-filled eyes as they traveled slowly over her mist-enveloped body, and her arms unconsciously covered her bare bosom. She started to unlace the bodice and stopped, knowing the scornful look and derisive laugh that that action would bring.

"No, damn him, I will wear it, but only because he thinks I won't." She retied the laces. The eyes that met hers in the mirror had a defiant glare in them.

The petticoat billowed out as it dropped into place, the layers of dainty lace puffed outward. The soft, rich velvet whispered as it swished to the floor; twisting and turning she posed in front of the mirror. Running her hand over the material she sighed. Never in her wildest dreams had she ever thought she would wear anything so lovely. She piled her hair high with several curls falling over one shoulder, a striking contrast to the creamy softness of her skin.

Jamie walked in boldly and stopped in mid-stride. She had been an enchanting woman dressed in the drab grey and black dresses of mourning. He had deliberately made her

wear them as a mark of chastisement, trying to conceal his own offense. Yet the dull, lifeless colours had refused to mask her beauty.

The Katy who stood before him now was intoxicating. Never had he beheld such an exquisite creature. Her eyes held the colour of the luminous sea-green depths and the sparkle of the stars on a summer eve. The dress enhanced the perfect body and made her even more lovely. He knew of no woman of red or blue blood who could match her beauty.

"Beautiful," he whispered holding out his hand to her, "exquisite. Nay, m'lady, there are no words to describe you."

She held her breath expectantly. From the look in his eyes she was sure he was going to say he loved her, but she waited in vain for those precious words.

"Something this perfect deserves to set off more perfection." From one of the drawers in his coffer he withdrew a gleaming silver case; when he opened it Katy gasped with delight, for inside were baubles of all kinds: rubies, pearls, diamonds and other stones she didn't recognize.

He withdrew a string of pearls and a pair of earrings and held them out to her.

"Oh, m'lord, they're so beautiful," she cried, "are they really for me?"

The dark scowl masked his face, "Only if you cease to call me that." His gentle tone and manner hardened.

She frowned trying to remember what she had said to displease him so. "Jamie, I'm sorry, it is such a habit with me."

"It is one you must break immediately. My name is Jamie, not Captain nor m'lord as you are so prone to barb me with." The sharpness that had come into his voice spoiled the lovely moments just shared.

"I shall try to remember." Her tone was low and subdued.

"Turn around." He fastened the pearls around her throat and putting his arms around her waist, drew her to him. The fragrant perfume filled his nostrils as he kissed the nape of

her neck. Shivers ran up her spine. He turned her to face him. His voice was husky, "I think you are a witch, for you are driving me mad." He kissed her passionately, his tongue seeking to arouse her desire.

She pushed him away breathlessly, "Please, Jamie, not—not so soon. Please be gentle, everything is happening too quickly."

With an effort he stepped back, scowling at her. "Of course, my sweet, I must remember, I am a gentleman and I must be gentle to my lovely, little—doxy, mustn't I?" His lips which had been so warm only moments before were now smiling coldly at her. The epithet thrown at her so casually struck as a blow. Roughly he handed her the earrings. She felt as if the plunging agonies and soaring ecstasies of love were more than she could endure.

"Put them in your ears so I can conclude whether my final judgment matches my prior one. Geese are not swans by a long sight, and I deplore overestimating the value of anything," he told her in harsh, clipped tones. She stood dejectedly under his gaze until he nodded his scowling approval.

A frantic knock came at the door.

"Come."

A young seaman appeared at the door, "Captain, a ship!"

"You stay below! No matter what happens, don't leave this cabin!" he hurled at her, then turning, ran after the crewman.

She heard them racing up the companionway with the sound of many feet joining theirs. Everywhere was the din of haste and confusion, excitement and frenzy. Men's voices were raised in shrill commands, others shouting information.

Katy sat tense and rigid in the cabin. Frightened as she was she needed to know what was going on topside. Each minute stretched into an eternity. The not knowing was agony. She forced herself to rise and go to the door. Jamie had commanded her to remain below, and she had always

been conditioned to obey commands, but what if he were injured in the coming battle? She opened the door and listened. The confusion seemed to be dying down. The corridor was empty and dim. Even in the far sweeping rays of daylight the long hall lay in shadows. Staying close to the wall, she reached the companionway and furtively made her way up the steep steps. Near the top she crouched down and made herself as small as possible, in order to watch unobserved.

Her eyes followed the tall masts heavenward. The huge sails were full and billowing, like great bonnets waving in the heavy breeze. The double cross of St. George and St. Andrew flew freely from the flag mast. Below it, the black and silver-striped banner with the hawk and serpent proclaimed the bastard Bartlett line.

The topmen were swarming into the rigging, quickly pulling themselves skyward. All top canvas was quickly being released to receive the welcoming breath. Then they slid down the shrouds and furled the filled clouds of sails below on the lower booms, lessening the risk of fire above the gunnery crew's exposed heads.

The youngest members of the crew, the powder monkeys, dashed up the steps beside her carrying powder cartridges tightly wrapped in flannel. Their bare feet and legs were black from the grimy powder. She watched them as they carefully lay the cartridges on top of others piled beside the huge twenty-four and thirty-two pounders. Metal balls stood in stacked piles beside the smaller cannons. Grapeshot and chain and bar shot were also handy for close quarter combat with the nine and twelve pounders. The powder monkeys made trip after trip up and down the ladder in their hurry to complete their tasks.

At last all the chaotic preparation was past and all of the men were at their posts waiting. Jamie was on the quarter-deck with his eye to the glass watching every minute sign and movement on the ship which was quickly approaching. Even with the naked eye Katy could see the

bow guns unveiled. The port side of the Spanish carrack was exposed to her view and at the gruesome sight Katy's heart shriveled in her breast. Each exposed aperture glinted evilly. Fear tightened her belly, and perspiration dampened her armpits and neck.

Suddenly the breeze died, and the billowing sails collapsed in the dormant air. Time seemed to die as had the wind. Every anxious eye watched the great vessel skimming across the waters towards them, seeming to defy the laws of nature. Then just as suddenly her canvas also hung limp and debilitated in the silent sky. Nevertheless, the enemy had gained many strategic yards. No doubt they too, like the crew of the Hawk, watched the flaccid yards of cloth desperately for a sign of the precious breath of wind.

Every furl had been let out for the race for life. Katy was surprised that Jamie had decided to run. Knowing nothing about ships, she was sure the Hawk was larger than the carrack chasing them and could more than take care of herself in a battle. The knowledge that Captain Bartlett had been an infamous pirate, hated and feared by the Spanish, also puzzled her; she would never have imagined him running from anyone.

Katy was so engrossed in the fascinating scenes before her, she failed to see Jamie racing towards her. His face was white, dark eyes black with anger, lips compressed into a thin, tight line and his square jaw jutted out in deadly ire. With a curse, he drew her to her feet by her hair. She shrank from the thunderous look in his eyes and cried out in her terror.

"Damn, woman!" he shouted and slapped her on one cheek, "When I give an order I intend for that order to be obeyed!" He backhanded her on the cheek.

She felt more than heard the restless murmurs among the crew who were watching the outrageous scene as though of one mind and one eye.

"Billy!" he shouted.

At that moment thunder resounded and Jamie threw her

to the deck and covered her body with his own as the foremast fell away and hung precariously a moment, then crashed below. The jibs dropped, hanging loosely, followed by the top mainsail and accompanying jiggers. The crash was thunderous, bringing every man to his feet. Cries of pain followed and men ran to help their fallen comrades.

Jerking Katy to her feet, he shoved her into Billy's arms savagely. "If one of my men had deliberately disobeyed me as you have, I would have him tied to the mast, stripped and flogged. Do not provoke me again. Since you belong to me, you will obey me! For I will be obeyed one way or another! Get her below and don't leave her!"

He turned and taking the steep stairs two at a time ran to the quarter-deck, crying, "Prepare for battle!" as he went. The first mate was bellowing orders when the Captain arrived at his post.

Billy pulled Katy down the steps and into the cabin gently, but firmly. The ship lurched again and again from the concussion of the guns, both the receiving and the sending of the missiles. Katy grabbed the portal of the bedchamber to steady herself.

"What did he mean, I belong to him!" she demanded. "He acts as if he owns me!" She cried angrily pushing her hair back out of her eyes.

"He do, mum, jist as he owns me," Billy answered.

"How absurd! I belong to myself! I suppose if anyone *owns* me it's Lord Carstair—and he's dead."

"The girl who was to come in yer place was purchased as a indentured servant by the Capt'n."

"Then he owns *her*, not me!"

Billy shrugged, unwilling to argue the point.

The door suddenly burst open revealing a seaman with blood streaming down his pain-racked, ashen face. He was holding up a wounded fellow crewman. "The Capt'n sent us," he apologised.

"Quickly, in here," she led them into her bedchamber. The

injured men protested weakly, but she firmly told them to lie down in the bed.

As she returned from the inner cabin, she was binding her hair. "Billy, I will need all the bandages and hot water you can bring me, and quickly. Also try to find some help, if possible." She cocked her head to one side listening to the thunder roaring from the red, belching mouths of the cannons. The ship lurched with each rumble. "Hurry, Billy!" She steadied herself against the desk's edge.

He ran to do her bidding, almost knocking over another wounded man making his way painfully to the cabin. When he returned with part of what she had asked for he had Baker in tow, who kept insisting he was a cook not a doctor. They carried one large pot of hot water between them and each had linens tucked under his arm.

"There's more water boilin', mum, and more linen in the galley."

Blood was clotted on the front of Katy's dress and smeared on her face. Her eyes were large and frightened, but she had a determined air about her that swelled Billy with pride.

"Hurry, hurry, Billy, and help me, there are so many." She looked around the room at the groaning men, who now took up all available space in her bedchamber and were still arriving. The stench of unwashed bodies, gun powder and blood filled her nostrils and Katy fought to keep her stomach from spewing forth the hot, bitter gall that kept rising in her throat. Her head felt light and her eyes blurred momentarily.

"Air ye all right, mum?" Billy asked anxiously, seeing the paleness descend across the brave lass's face.

"Yes, yes," she answered him sharply, rising quickly. She put her hand out to him as she swayed slightly.

He clasped her hand in his. "Please, m'lady, sit down fer a minute'r two," he begged.

"There is no time to sit." She looked around the room in helpless fury at those who groaned in agony. "Oh, God!" she

cried, "is this all men can do to one another, hurt, maim and kill?" The overwhelming feeling of weariness swept over her and with tremendous effort she pushed the exhaustion away.

Setting Baker to tearing the linens into strips and Billy to helping her bathe the wounded and bind their injuries, she moved among the men, who welcomed the cool hands, the brave smile, and the warm gentle words which gave them hope and strength.

The ship suddenly pitched as if a huge wave had hit it. Frightened, Katy raised her eyes to the stern windows and saw the enemy vessel. The red and gold banner of Spain flew brazenly from its mast. The enemy had fallen several hundred yards behind the limping Hawk and fire was even now devouring her heavy canvas. Flames were avidly licking at the towering masts. Screams of agony rose above the many sounds of destruction that rent the air. Katy put her hands to her ears to close off the horrifying noises. Suddenly an explosion ripped at the bowels of the enemy vessel as a lucky ball penetrated the powder room. The carrack was bathed in an eerie, crimson glow. It appeared to melt from within. Then Katy's eardrums were shattered by another tumultuous explosion. The Hawk pitched and rocked as concussion after concussion hit the hull of the ship. Katy was thrown from side to side like a rag doll. Groans and screams ripped at her ears and she wasn't sure whether her voice blended with the others or not. Furniture was torn from the floor and hurled through the air as if by witchcraft. Something struck her on the temple and darkness released her from the nightmare surrounding her.

Chapter 6

Jamie surveyed the disaster. His face showed strain and fatigue under the sweat-streaked grime and gun powder. Everything he could do on deck was done or being done. He had come below to check the damage himself, disbelieving the reports of the calamity the explosion had caused.

The moans and cries of pain and anguish assaulted him from all sides. His men reached out imploringly to him, begging release from their suffering. He touched and called them by name, assuring them he would help all that he could. He stepped over their wounded bodies, searching, until he saw Billy and fell to his knees beside his friend. Blood ran from a gash on his forehead; Jamie breathed a sigh of relief when the older man stirred.

"Capt'n." Struggling weakly, he sat up with the captain's help and propped himself on one arm. He wiped his hand across his forehead and frowned with puzzlement as he looked at the crimson stain. Slowly recollection returned and his eyes swept the room. "Where's the mistress, Capt'n?"

Their eyes met and held for a scant second. "Katy?" Alarm rang in Jamie's voice as his eyes darted around the room. "Where is she?" He jumped up and started searching frantically.

"Look in the other room, Capt'n."

Jamie stumbled over debris and bodies in his frenzy, finally making his way into the bedroom. He paused at the doorway and surveyed the cluttered room. Furniture lay in confusion. Great tears in the Persian carpet declared the force of the upheaval, for where the heavy gilded furnishings had been secured against such an occasion, large rips in the blue-hued carpet and splintered rents in the floor beneath gave silent evidence of the full strength of the concussion. Once more his eyes swept the room. Underneath the window he caught sight of dark green velvet; a small black slipper peeked out from under his overturned heavy chest. Fear and panic added strength to his straining limbs as he cleared a pathway. Casting aside the rubble with low muttered curses, he found the chest resting on an open, broken drawer and not on the unconscious girl. A sigh of relief escaped his tightly compressed lips.

As he struggled with the rubble to clear a path to her, he cast a look behind him. Billy stood on unsteady legs against the portal.

"Billy, get some help in here!"

Soon a dozen men were cleaning away the debris and moving the wounded into their own berths. The bed clothes were blood-soaked and grimy. Jamie stripped the bed himself and ordered clean linen on it before he would allow Katy to be placed there. Sitting on one of the unbroken chairs, he held her gently. Tenderly his hands touched her. The white skin was broken and bruised wherever it showed through the torn garment. Blood crusted the softness he knew so well. Her pale skin felt cold and clammy to his hands; the pulse at the base of her throat beat very slowly, hardly visible to his anxious eye.

"The bed is ready, Capt'n," one of the crew informed him.

With a jerk of his head he ordered everyone out of the cabin. Cutting her clothes off, he laid her back in the bed with an unknown tenderness. The hot water Billy had brought in was found on the righted commode. His hands moved over her body with the gentleness of a mother. As the soap and water washed the blood and grime away, several cuts and contusions were revealed to show the fury of the buffeting she had endured. He gently touched the bruise at her temple with his lips. It seemed to grow before his eyes.

"Oh, God," he groaned, "my beautiful Katy." His arms longed to press her to his aching breast. A knock at the door interrupted his grief. He drew the comforter around the abused slender form.

"Capt'n, do ye be needin' any help, sir?" Billy asked from the doorway. His heart ached from the sight of the beautiful colleen lying unconscious and helpless before him.

"No, Billy, I'll care for her." He turned to the man, "How is everything going?"

"Mr. Cruse says it'll be takin' four or five days at least to git 'er in running shape. Don't know how long to complete repairs. That damned Spaniard near t' crippled us good, sir. We lost thirty men and have a goodly number injured. The carpenters air already beginnin' their tasks. We lost the main mast and most of our tops'il and we're takin' in some water below; they're workin' on that now. Oh, yes, the men thank ye for the spirits, sir. It seems to have eased their pain."

"Good, if it depletes the whole supply, use it. Make sure everyone gets an extra ration of grog with their meals, they've earned it. Keep me posted. Also, bring me a bottle of brandy."

"Ye need to eat, Capt'n."

"Just bring me the brandy, Billy," he told the man quietly.

"Aye, sir."

Billy returned shortly, carrying the brandy and a goblet. Jamie opened the bottle and poured a little of the brandy on a swab of linen and squeezed a few drops on Katy's lips. It ran off her closed mouth and he sponged the droplets.

"Katy," he whispered, "can you hear me?" There was no inclination that his voice had touched her consciousness.

He massaged her throat gently and squeezed the swab again. "Katy, swallow."

Billy stood at the door and watched his master administer to the stricken girl. Shaking his head sadly, he closed the door behind him.

The minutes grew into hours and the hours to days, yet there was no change in the insensible girl. Jamie refused to leave her side. In his concern he paced the floor for hours, then would stop and check her breathing or her pulse and commence pacing again. His eyes were bloodshot and red-rimmed from the lack of sleep and heavy drinking. His face was shadowed by a three day growth of beard.

He stood at the opened window staring at the rising and falling white-capped waves, emptying his mind of the terrible thoughts of losing her. Until that moment he had never given thought to the void she filled in his life, an emptiness he had been unable to fill for many years.

He had tried to fill that loneliness with beautiful women, drinking and the excitement found in Jamaica, London, and Paris, but the gut-rending loneliness that tormented him made it impossible to nurture close relationships with women. He had found most women flighty and prone to selfishness and deception.

Amelia Darcy had been the classic example. She had been everything he had been taught from childhood to expect from the daughters of Eve. And she had not disappointed him. He had known from the very beginning of her true nature and he had not bothered to explain to Billy and Mr. Cruse that the angry turmoil which had ripped him apart before leaving England was not the treatment he had received from Amelia, but the useless taking of Markley's life over the fickle nature of a woman.

Of course, when Markley had shouted the insult and cast the slur of whore upon his own wife in the presence of others Jamie had known there was no recourse but to challenge the

jealous husband. If the bitter scene had occurred in private he would have agreed with his Lordship and departed without compunction, leaving Amelia to her own sly devices of setting the matter to rights as her talents led her. In that department he had been aware that her talents were unlimited.

There was only one woman worth all the effort a man put forth in preserving the female-male relationship and he was in danger of losing her. Only one—nay, two and she already lost.

Memory pricked him and visions of an earlier year stirred within him. In his mind's eye a raven-haired and sapphire-eyed vixen thrust herself forward and stood before him arrogantly proud and exquisitely beautiful. As she stamped haughtily across the ship's deck with head held high and arms akimbo he remembered a tattered blouse clinging precariously to an impertinent full-blown bosom. An abbreviated and torn pair of breeches covered rounded hips and bottom and little else, leaving olive-skinned thighs and long slender legs bare to the stares of the prurient brotherhood. A pair of arrogant, aristocratic ice-blue eyes and a long, curling whip had kept everyone at a distance from Elana Margarita Carlotta Maria Esquivella, the Sea Witch. For a short season their love had soared across the Carribean. But even as a raging fire blazes and sears, then slowly dies, leaving only ashes behind, so also wanes the flaming passion of infatuated youth.

He had never been able to forget completely the fiery rapture of his first love. His eyes turned often to the fair beauty behind him. Never would he part with this treasured jewel! Somehow he must turn her heart to him. Somehow—some way—he must find a path into the arctic chambers of her soul.

When Katy moved slightly he rushed to her side and sat on the edge of the bed holding her hand, repeating her name.

The bruise now covered the right side of her face from temple to jaw. It ran across her nose, shading the injured area

in ghastly pastel hues. The swelling was receding but some of the tender puffiness still remained.

Suddenly, she jerked her hand from his, whimpering, "No, no, don't touch me."

Jamie felt a sharp pain pierce his heart at her words. He laid his hand on her shoulder whispering soothing words to her. She shrank from him, crying. "Don't touch me, you beast! I'll kill you!" Her feverish eyes glinted like polished jewels. Moaning she tossed back and forth.

A dark expression of hurt crossed his face as he stood above her listening to the words of rejection rushing from her trembling lips. Quick angry strides took him across the room where he jerked the door open.

"Billy!" The man jumped to his feet and hurried into the room. "You sit with her now. I think she is finally coming out of it. I think she will be all right now." He spoke in grim clipped tones that puzzled his servant. "I will lie down and rest for awhile." He grabbed the bottle of brandy and fled.

Billy watched his master worriedly. He saw him stop in the middle of the room and turn the bottle upside down, draining it, then heave it against the wall. Jamie sat down on the couch holding his head in his hands.

"Close the door, Billy, and take care of Katy," Jamie told him tonelessly.

"Aye, sir."

As the door closed Jamie heard the small voice cry, "No, please, please leave me alone." He fell back against the couch and stared vacantly at the ceiling.

Billy was sitting in a half sleep when he heard Katy crying. He hurried to her side.

"Jamie, help me," she pleaded. "No, don't touch me!" Her voice rose shrilly in panic. "Please, Jamie, where are you? I need you."

She tossed back and forth and sat up suddenly. Her eyes stared straight ahead, unaware of anything or anyone around her. She raised her hand and watched it descend. Horror spread across her face at the horrendous act just

committed. Grabbing the edge of the quilt she scrubbed the hand harshly. Looking at Billy with tears running down her cheeks, she sobbed, "Oh, Jamie, I've killed him, help me. Help me," she begged as sobs racked her.

Hands shaking, Billy gently touched her shoulder, pushing her back against the pillow, covering her. Driven to the straining point from the yearnings within, he felt like a drawn bow string; suddenly he let out a lungful of air and forced himself to turn away. He knew his master's unpredictable temper and knew he would be flogged within a breath of life if the Captain even suspected him of gazing upon his doxy with lust in his heart.

Billy turned his gaze to her again. His eyes softened as they beheld the beauteous colleen before him. He knew that beneath the bruised loveliness dwelt an inward beauty. The beauty of a generous heart and an innocent soul. Even though she had suffered the physical and mental abuses of the Captain there was still the aura surrounding her of innocence and virginity. At that moment Billy realized his emotions ran deeper than lust and shuddered to think that he could dare to love one such as she.

The sun was shining brilliantly on the water, casting multi-coloured glimmers of jeweled light within the cabin. The shimmers darted and danced on the ceiling and walls, like reflections cast from crystal prisms. Jamie opened the door quietly. Billy was immediately on his feet. The Captain was bathed, shaved and meticulously dressed in the black doublet and breeches he habitually wore. Sleep had erased all the fatigue lines away. The stern, rigid mask was once more in place.

"How did she pass the night?" he asked softly.

Billy matched the same tone. "A little restless, sir. She be still unconscious. It's wishin' I am we had a physicker aboard. I've never knowed anyone to be alyin' in a near sleep so long as the bonny lass, sir."

"Nor I, Billy. But all we can do is try to take care of her, the

best we can and hope." He walked to the foot of the bed and looked at Katy. The bruised side of her face was turned into the pillow and she looked so lovely a knot formed in Jamie's throat. He cleared his throat and moved away from the bed. His stony countenance seemed to tighten into a carved mask.

"There is a pan of water to sponge her off with on my desk, bring it in and then go get some food and rest." Billy moved to obey the icy command. When he returned with the basin, he set it on the commode and hesitated as if to ask the Captain a question, then appeared to change his mind and left.

With a newly discovered gentleness, Jamie sponged her face, then arms and hands. Sitting quietly beside Katy, he studied her for several minutes feeling the turbulence coursing through his confused consciousness. Reluctantly his mask dropped and a tenderness crept across his face as he reached out and touched her bruised cheek lightly.

"Ah, lovely one, do you know how much hell you are putting me through? And if you did, would it give you pleasure?"

He continued to look at her with the same tender expression for several minutes longer. He sighed, "Am I only to express my feelings for you while you sleep, lest I see the scorn and loathing you feel for me rise in your eyes?"

Shaking off the melancholy mood, he rose. Opening the drawer he had set aside for her few articles of clothing, he removed one of the shirts that she had altered to fit herself. He ran his fingers over the small, neat stitches. Then with the same depressed spirit, he dressed her. Usually at the sight of her bared flesh, his blood surged through the veins and set his mind and body into an inescapable spiral of passions; but this day the creamy, milk-white loveliness created another feeling which he found hard to interpret. He let his mind search for the answer and when it came, he scoffed to himself in impatience and cast it aside, refusing to accept the answer. He paced the floor moodily, casting accusing glances at the unsuspecting girl.

Later while Billy watched over her, Jamie stamped his guilt across the deck. The men watched him from the corners of their eyes while at their work, unable to believe that a strong man like their captain was being torn apart by a slender snip of a female. Everyone knew sailors had one in every port and loved them and left them. Where the Captain made his mistake, they speculated, was bringing her along with him.

Later as he continued his pacing in her bedroom, he was aware of movement. Immediately he was at her side. She blinked her eyes and looked at him smiling weakly. "Jamie."

He took her hand and held it tightly, feeling a foolish grin cross his face.

"What happened?"

"Do you remember the battle?" At her nod he continued, "Well, we blew up the enemy ship and we were just too close for comfort. You were knocked unconscious. Now you had better lie back and rest. We can talk about the rest later, when you are well rested." She nodded weakly. "Welcome back, darling."

"Could I have a drink?" Her voice came as a whisper.

He held the cup as she sipped the water. "Jamie, did you call m—" her voice trailed off into sleep. A soft smile lingered on her lips.

Later in the day he returned to her. She had evidently gotten the story of all that had transpired from Billy, for he stood by the bed ringing his hands helplessly, his face an abject picture of consternation. A mirror lay near her hand and she was sobbing as if her heart would break. Jamie looked at his servant through his dark scowl, demanding an answer.

"Capt'n, she wanted t' know what had happened t' herself, so I told her about the battle. Her mind be still foggy, fer she remembers little. I told her how she be hurt and she wanted the mirror to see fer herself." He gestured toward the bed helplessly. "What am I t' do, Capt'n?"

"Leave us," Jamie told him gruffly.

Billy's shoulders hung dejectedly as he left the room.

Jamie walked slowly to the side of the bed and stood watching Katy. The black scowl still masked his face, only the eyes revealed the compassion he felt. He let her cry until she lay back exhausted.

"Oh, Jamie, how can you stand to look at me?" The right side of her face was swollen and discoloured blue, green, purple and yellow from forehead to jaw and over the bridge of her nose.

"It will go away, Katy. Already it is better. But it will take time." He sat down beside her and took her cold hand in his. "Don't worry so much about it. By the time all the bruise goes away, we will think you twice as beautiful, if that can be endured."

She broke out anew into tears. Gathering her into his arms, he could feel the warmth and firmness of her against him. He steeled himself against his rising emotions, cursing the day she had entered his heart. He seemed to have no control over himself at all anymore where Katy was concerned, telling himself she must never know or she would control him in the end. He hated the weakness that grew stronger with each embrace, having always been taught women were but chattel, to be used or misused at a man's pleasure. He had revealed his love, such as it was, to Amelia and she had ridiculed and degraded him. Never would he do that foolish thing again, for this lovely creature had a stronger hold on him than he thought conceivable. He must continue to conceal his state of mind and treat her as before, as there was no love for him within her breast. She blew hot or cold as her whim dictated. She could be as fire, hot and demanding, in their lovemaking or cold as marble. The frustrations that wracked him were so demanding and exasperating he felt as if he were going mad, but there was too much of his father in him to relent and be kind and gentle to her for very long. He recognized the fact that he was acting more and more like his sire every day and hated himself for his weakness as much as he hated his father for his.

She grew quiet in his arms and he laid her back onto the pillow. "Do you feel better now?"

She nodded, disappointed that he had shown her no more tenderness than he had.

"Tears seem to be the soothing balm a woman needs to overcome all difficulties." He rose. "I will send some broth to you and inform the crew about your improved condition. They have been inquiring about you daily."

Her heart felt like a lump of ice. "Jamie," she sobbed as she heard the cabin door close.

She hardly saw him for the next few days. Sleeping on the couch in his cabin or on deck so she could continue to recuperate from her ordeal, he usually came in after she had broken her fast; he never touched her and she longed for his touch as a thirsty man for water. He seemed eager to leave her and gave the excuse of much work still to be done on the Hawk. As the days slipped by Billy could hardly get a word out of her. She refused to eat unless he threatened to call the Captain. Billy coaxed her to dress and come on deck to lie in the warmth of the sun. She would only shake her head listlessly. The bruise on her face continued to fade and was nearly gone, yet she would look into her mirror several times a day, sometimes breaking into tears. She was now certain that Jamie avoided her because he had found her ugly while she carried the horrible mark on her face. She could hardly bring herself to look into the mirror anymore.

Billy was beside himself. He longed to do something to cheer her and see her face light up with that glowing smile which had been missing for so long. His heart ached with sadness as he saw the growing bond between her and the Captain deteriorating. Unhappiness spread over the ship like a black shroud. The Captain's dark moods grew darker and his temper shorter. He was like a lit fuse on a powder keg and everyone walked softly around him in these days.

One day while observing his mistress, Billy was shocked to see the thinness of her wrists and arms. He searched her face and saw it was pinched and gaunt, her cheek bones

protruded and her eyes were shadowed and seemed to fill her whole face. He had known for some days she was hardly eating at all. She seemed to have gotten thin all at once.

He knew her to be terribly unhappy as he had found her crying several times or seen the damp lashes and red eyes.

"Mistress," he blurted out, "tell me what I kin do to help ye."

"Nothing, Billy, no one can do anything."

"I'll get the Capt'n—" he started for the door.

"No!" She cried out in anguish, "please! Not him!"

"But somethin' must be done. Yer grievin' yerself to death over somethin'. Tell me, my lady, maybe I kin help."

"Billy, you are such a dear friend. What would I do without you?"

His heart ached as he would have wished to be more than a friend to her. Guilt swept over him for he knew he aspired too high, for she was his Captain's lady.

"It would be better if I had died." The sadness in her voice tore at his heart.

"Nay, m'lady, don't say such things."

"I have read in books of people dying of a broken heart, but never believed it. I always thought that when you loved, you were happy and contented, not miserable and wishing for death."

"Love kin take ye t' the heights of delight and the depths o' despair," he told her and added quickly, "so I be told."

"Then it must be love that I feel, for I have experienced both." Tears trickled slowly down her cheeks. "Oh, God, if he only loved me."

"But he do, mum."

"No, what he feels for me is only the desire of lust, for he has told me so." She replied bitterly.

Billy patted Katy's shoulder awkwardly just as Jamie entered.

"Well, well, what a cozy sight. My servant and my—doxy consoling each other in their time of need, no doubt."

Katy shuddered at the contempt in his voice and at the vile insinuation directed at her.

"Capt'n, no, it's not as it seems," Billy protested.

"Leave us, I shall see you later." Then he turned to Katy. "Must you tempt all of us, madam! Aren't you content with only one? Or would you enjoy the attentions of my whole crew?"

She turned her face from him in embarrassment and humiliation.

He grabbed her roughly by the chin and turned her face to his. "Don't turn away from me when I am speaking to you," he growled. His blazing eyes held hers scornfully and his arm swept her against him painfully. With a curse, his mouth came down on her ruthlessly, crushing her lips against her teeth and forcing them open.

"Does Billy kiss you like this? Does he make your heart hammer as I can feel it this moment?" He placed his large hand on her chest, covering her wildly, beating heart. "Or does he kiss you like this?" His mouth moved upon hers once more, this time gently. His hands roamed a familiar path across her body, caressing her with a latent tenderness. She lay without moving or protesting until he thrust her away from him savagely. Wiping her lips with the back of her hand, she found it smeared with blood.

"My lord, Billy has never touched me except with respect as is seeming for a servant of the great Captain Bartlett. Any punishment for the one moment of compassion he has shown should be given to me, for it is true—I did tempt him, in my moment of weakness, with a woman's soothing balm—tears."

He heard her explanation with cold, slitted eyes, then muttered an angry oath and hurled himself out of the room.

Billy was waiting anxiously for him in the other room. Never had he seen the Captain in such a temper. While he had watched the angry young laird brutally kissing the young lass he felt hate erase all the love he had known these

many years for the man he thought of as a son; then he saw the anguish and jealousy and self-hatred written on Jamie's face.

"Capt'n, sir—"

"Not now, Billy. Bring me a bottle and leave me alone," he commanded harshly.

For the next two days the Captain neither slept nor ate. The cabin was filled with the smell of brandy and rum and rang with curses. Billy tip-toed around taking care of the needs of both his patients. Finally the Captain collapsed in a state of drunken exhaustion and Billy helped him to the couch where he fell into a deep sleep.

He looked up to see Katy weakly holding on to the door frame. He ran to her and helped her into a nearby chair.

"Is he all right?" she asked through still bruised lips.

"Aye, jist passed out."

"But what is wrong?" She surveyed the broken glass lying around and the stains on the wooden walls.

"He's but a man in love, not darin' to admit it."

"Don't lie to me, Billy. Not about that, please."

"Tis no lie, m'lady. Only he don't know what's wrong and it's tearin' 'im apart and hurtin' everyone he comes in contact with. Have patience with 'im, mum, he needs ye."

Katy looked at the unconscious man. His face was relaxed and now held an almost boyish look. This was the Jamie she loved, if only this Jamie existed all the time.

"Take me back Billy. I'm afraid you'll have to carry me. I don't think I can walk." She told him softly.

He lifted her and was surprised how terribly light she felt in his arms. His hand felt seared from the touch of her bare thigh, the warmth spread through his body, even as guilt crept into his heart from the pleasure of touching her. She lay pale and wan in his arms, yet still lovely and desirable. He lay her down on the bed and she rested there spent and weak.

"Billy," she whispered, "what am I to do? I just can't die, not now. Yet I have no desire to live if he doesn't love

me—but I can't continue like this either. Oh, God, what am I to do? I never knew that I could love someone so much. I go from one extreme to another. Lately it is mostly the depths of despair. If only he would say 'I love you,' I would be content." She turned her head so he would not see the tears fall.

"He'll tell ye, m'lady, mark my words," he assured her. "He'll tell ye or I'll strangle 'im," he added to himself.

Jamie sat at his desk with a book opened in front of him, his head between his hands. He was pretending to read but was really nursing the left over pangs of a monstrous hang-over. As he sipped from the goblet he watched Billy over the rim.

Billy sat observing his every move and in the subtle light he could see new lines marking the harshness of his master's eyes and mouth. The crease between his eyes had now deepened into a crevice. Billy's mind wandered, trying to think of a way he could bring up the subject he and Katy had spoken of a few days before.

Jamie put the cup down, Billy's eyes never left his face. He waited for his friend to say something, but he just sat and stared at him.

"Did you want to say something to me, Billy?" When he didn't respond Jamie set the cup down harder. "Billy!"

He started. "Aye, sir."

"Is there something weighing on your mind?"

"Ah well—that is, yes, sir, there is."

"Well then, say it and quit stuttering, man. You have never been shy about it before." The Captain clasped his hands in front of him on the desk.

"It's about the mistress, sir." He watched the hands clench and relax. "I don't know how to say this, Capt'n. Maybe it's oversteppin' my bounds, I am. But ye got t' do somethin'; she's grievin' herself to death over ye. Have ye quarreled, sir?"

"You are correct, sir, you are overstepping your bounds. It is none of your business." He told him in short, crisp overtones, the dark eyes narrowing.

"But it *is* my business, sir. Ye put 'er in my care."

"Which I am beginning to think was bad judgment on my part. She needs a woman to take care of her."

"Ye may be right there, sir, but fer the nonce, she is my responsibility, but I canna take care o' what ails 'er now."

"What ails her now? Get to the point, for God's sake."

"When did ye see 'er to talk to 'er last, sir?"

"A couple of days ago," he said impatiently. His hands were clenched tightly, the knuckles turning white.

"Closer to a week, Capt'n. She's asleep now, go in and look at 'er." He could see the denial in the dark eyes. "Please, sir. Closely, sir."

"For God's sake, man, why?"

"Do it, Capt'n," he insisted.

Exasperated the Captain jumped to his feet and went quickly into the bedroom. The lamp was turned low, but he could see Katy clearly. The dark circles lay deeply upon her cheeks and the light intensified the protruding cheekbones. Her face was pale and pinched. Her arms and hands were lying outside the quilt and were thin, almost skeletal. Only her hair looked alive and he raised it to his lips. Hurrying outside he closed the door quietly.

"Billy," he spoke, alarm ringing in his voice, "what in the hell is going on? She isn't dying, is she?"

"Aye, sir."

"But why? She seemed to be getting better."

"She don't want to git better."

"But why?" he cried in anguish.

"She thinks ye don't love 'er and thus she don't have anythin' to live fer."

"That's nonsense," Jamie said crossly. "Of course, I love her."

"Have ye told 'er so?"

"No, I don't suppose in so many words, but I have made love to her..."

"She counts that as lust, not love."

"How do you know all this?" Jamie demanded, thrusting his hands on his hips.

"We had a long talk the day after ye passed out, sir."

"And she told you all this?" Jamie asked unbelievably.

"Well, most of it, the rest of it I've been observing meself."

"I think you have observed too much and have done too little," Jamie told him heatedly.

"Tis true enough, sir. Fer some days now I've noticed she can't keep food down until late in the day. She's too weak to walk by 'erself and really don't care if she lives nor dies."

"Why didn't you report all this to me?" Black eyes glared at the nervous servant. "I put you in charge of her so you could see to her needs. The Hawk is still in need of repairs. My ship needs my full attention now. If we run across another Spanish ship we'll be unable to defend ourselves. I have no time for a hysterical woman on my hands right now."

"The lass needs ye, Captain." Billy reminded the unconvinced man.

Jamie whirled away from the quiet spoken friend. His back was rigid and unyielding, Billy could see only the muscles in the square jaw jerking convulsively. The Captain's voice sounded harsh and cold. "Billy, I have over one hundred and fifty men aboard the Hawk, if we should meet another Spanish galleon and find ourselves unprepared for battle will I be able to excuse myself by saying a bonny lass needed me? Wherein lies the greater need?" The silence deepened. "You should have informed me of this matter in the beginning so I could have put a stop to it."

"I wanted to tell ye, sir, but she forbid me to say anythin' to ye. I passed it off, thinkin' she was sad and that it would pass. I figure the two o' ye had quarreled and soon one o' ye would relent and all would be well."

"You should have made her eat," Jamie faced him. "If that failed, you should have disobeyed her wishes and told me. If she dies, I shall never forgive you."

"No, Jamie, if she dies, the burden will be yours. You've used 'er meanly, beat 'er and humiliated 'er, yet she loves ye and the only thin' akeepin' 'er alive now is the hope she'll hear ye say ye love 'er."

Jamie bristled at the harsh accusations and heated words rose to his lips only to die as Billy said she loved him. He listened intently to the words though they cut deeply, but knew them to be true since it was the only time that Billy had ever called him by his Christian name. Yet doubt lingered.

"She loves me?" he asked in amazement. "No, that is not true. I know that she hates me, for she has told me so many times. She doesn't want me to touch her, she thinks that I am a beast."

"When did she tell ye that, sir?"

"When she was delirious; after the accident."

"She said a lot o' things while she be delirious, but not that, not about ye. 'Twasn't ye she was talkin' about, t'was that Lord Carstair she thought she had kilt. When I be in there with her, she was abeggin' ye to help 'er. I watched 'er stab his Lordship and wash the blood from off 'er hands."

"God! Can she really be so upset about trying to kill that bastard after what he tried to do to her?"

Billy bit back the words that would remind Jamie how he had used her.

"Can a creature as lovely as that truly love me?"

"Aye sir, she do." His voice had softened and saddened, but Jamie didn't notice the change that touched his servant's face and voice.

"Ye must be tellin' 'er how I overheard 'em talkin' about the stabbin' in the pub and that Lord Carstair's still be ative. She must be aknowin' she ain't a murderess."

"Aye," Jamie agreed.

"Ye must also convince 'er ye loves 'er, sir."

"Must!" he raised his eyebrow at the demand.

"Aye, Captain, if ye want 'er to live, ye must." He met his master's eyes and Jamie dropped his gaze. Billy rose and crossed to the door. "Goodnight, sir."

Jamie sat at the desk for a long time postponing the meeting with Katy. He had no idea how to approach the problem, let alone solve it. Finally he arose and entered the room. She was awake now and he could see her watching him as he came towards her.

"Katy, I have had a long talk with Billy. May I talk with you?"

One thin shoulder shrugged weakly.

"May I sit here beside you?" When she didn't protest he sat down. Taking her thin hand in his he raised it to his lips. He felt her tremble at his touch.

"I did not realise how much the trouble that made you want to flee England weighed so heavily on your mind." She whimpered and tried to release her hand. "If I had known the full story I could have put your mind at ease. Billy overheard part of what happened in a pub in Blyth. Lord Carstair is very much alive. He came near to dying, but is still kicking. I am sure he is trying to seduce some other young damsel this very moment."

She raised her hand and covered her eyes. Salty drops escaped and she cried quietly.

"I never gave it a thought that it would trouble you so. The bastard really had it coming to him, you know."

Silence invaded the room and hung heavy between them. Only their breathing and escaping sobs could be heard as Katy stared at him. Anger stirred in her breast as she glared at the insensitive lout sitting beside her; her fever glazed eyes searched his face for some hint of guilt, but it remained passive.

"What about *this* bastard, m'lord?" She whispered hoarsely.

He stiffened at the epithet and forced himself to remain calmly at her side. She watched his face, her accusation had fallen on barren ground, he held no sense of guilt in his

relationship with her. She could see the suppressed fury in his clenched jaw and slitted eyes at the hated name she had cast at him. She watched the reproach grow in his narrow, vindictive stare.

In the silence that followed he could hear her quiet breathing, the waves lapping against the ship, the jibs creaking and groaning in the quietness, the wind whispering in the sails. The thought came to him that in all the years he had spent at sea he had never really listened before to the silence of the night.

Her eyes that had glistened with fever for so long now glowed with a deep-set anger. Rising, he went to his coffer; opening a drawer he removed something. Walking toward the bed, he took off his shirt, his bare chest flashing in the subdued light; several scars gleamed chalky white beneath the black patch of hair. She shrank back against the pillow as he sat down. Taking her hand, he placed the cold steel in it.

"You are correct, Katy, this bastard deserves it too."

She raised her hand and saw the long blade glitter in the light. Uttering a cry, she dropped the knife; it clattered to the floor at his feet. She moved to the other side of the bed trying to escape him; hard racking sobs slipped through the hand held tightly to her lips. His arms enclosed her as she struggled to be free; cradling her in his arms he tried to quiet her.

"Ah, Katy, my love. Go on and cry. It will heal the wounds you have carried these long weeks."

Her feeble movements soon ceased and she lay against him watching him with impassive and defeated eyes. Still holding her, he slid down into the bed. The night passed slowly as he lay staring at the rough-beamed ceiling listening to her quiet, steady breathing, finally dropping off to sleep toward morning.

The sun blazed into the room, its warm rays reaching toward the bed. Jamie stirred and opened his eyes. Katy lay across the bed watching him, her eyes like emerald pools.

"Good morning, love," he told her softly.

"Good morning, m'lord."

He withheld the angry retort at the hated title. Moving closer to her, he tangled his hand in her hair, liking the soft feel of the gossamer strands. It never failed to give him a warm sense of sensual pleasure as the fiery tresses fell through his long, slender fingers. A sudden feeling of tenderness overcame him and he raised upon his elbow and kissed her gently. To his chagrin she gave no response. She would not meet his eyes and turned her head from him. Angry from the rebuff, he rose without a word, dressed and left.

He returned a little later with tray in hand. "Your breakfast, madam." Katy noted his derisive nature had returned.

"Jamie, I can't eat."

"You can this morning, Katy, and will."

As he walked to the bedside table his boot struck something. Bending down he picked it up, their eyes meeting over the gleam of the knife blade. He put it away without comment.

"Now, to breakfast."

"Oh, no, please. I just can't."

"Sh-h. Just try. One sip at a time," he lifted the spoon to her lips. "For me," he grinned boyishly.

She took a sip. He coaxed one spoonful at a time into her until she turned her face away and refused any more.

"Now, don't you feel better?"

She nodded dejectedly.

"Good," he took her hand. "I must go on deck. But I shall return later with some more broth." He squeezed her hand and left.

As she lay there she tried to remember all the harsh words he had spoken to her, the way he had used and humiliated her, hoping the hurtful memories would turn her heart to stone. She clutched distractedly at her hair and pummeled the pillow as the distress built within her.

"Oh, God, no! Help me, please help me to hate him," she lamented. She pushed all the tender moments and deeds

away. She tried not to remember that he had refused to leave her while she was so ill. The memory of his lips caressing hers and the longing for his arms embracing her overshadowed all her agonised thoughts.

"Oh, Father in Heaven, I mustn't love him for he doesn't love me nor does he want me to be the mother of his children," her prayer faltered, "... only his doxy."

She turned on her side and curled up in a tight ball, weeping bitter tears until she lay drained and exhausted. Soon she slept.

She was still sleeping when Jamie returned with more broth. He watched her face mirror the anguish of her dreams. She twisted and muttered unintelligible words. His face hardened and the anger was directed inward.

"Katy, wake up," he shook her gently.

She was instantly awake. "Yes, m'lord." It pleased her to see how much he resented the title.

"Time to eat," he told her with the same forced cheerfulness he had assumed earlier in the day.

"No, Jamie, please no more." Her stomach quailed at the mere thought of food. "I think I am going to be sick."

"Yes, my girl, more. If you vomit it up, we will just get more until you hold it down. Four or five times a day at least, until you are soft and round once more. I like my women with a bit more meat on them, then the bones do not poke so much. You see what happens when I leave you in Billy's care, don't you?" He forced her to sip from the spoon again and again.

Her health and strength returned to her slowly as the days passed. Colour returned to her cheeks and she would smile again. Each day found Jamie at her bedside feeding her like a baby. Most of the time she lay quiet and subdued, morosely accepting the constrained cheerful attention he gave her. Sleeplessly, he lay by her side at night, compelling himself to lie still so as not to awaken her. Many nights he paced the floor continually either in the cabin or on deck, or stood at

the open window quietly fighting the thoughts that besieged him. Silently he cursed himself for his faltering and weakening reserves. One by one his inner eye saw them crumbling around him.

As the colour returned to her cheeks and strength replaced weakness, she expressed a desire to get up. Once more Jamie opened the great chest and held the beautiful gowns up against him one at a time. She chose a yellow one with green and beige leaves and flowers embroidered on it. Jamie picked out her underclothes and handed them to her.

"You know, of course, that you should always wear green," his hand touched her lightly as the clothes were accepted. "When we get to Jamaica we will buy every green dress on the island. It makes your eyes so lovely."

She blushed and dropped her eyes for his intent gaze revealed the surging storm raging inside him. He forced his hands to stop shaking as he helped her to stand and with determined step turned away from her while she undressed. The altered shirt she had adopted fell to the middle of her thigh, revealing little, suggesting much. His steps took him to the window and he stood with booted foot propped upon the seat, purposely watching the tranquil sea. A muttered oath broke his lips and Katy's head jerked in his direction suspiciously, then returned her attention to the task of dressing. He turned back to her as the petticoat slipped over her head. She had lost so much weight, he noted absently, that her hip bones jutted out against her shift, but her stomach bulged ever so slightly. His mind was immediately diverted as she swayed.

He reached her and held her against him. The warmth of her body against his flooded his mind with memories, causing the muscles in his loins to tingle and swell. It had been so long since he had touched her with longing that the hunger showed in his eyes and she pushed him away with a cry of distress.

In annoyed silence, he helped to gather her dress and pull

it over her head. While she buttoned it up, he restlessly paced the floor. She watched him with rising irritation as he crossed the floor several times.

"Must you do that all the time?" she snapped.

"Do what?" he asked coldly as he stopped in mid-stride, viewing her darkly with arms akimbo.

"Pace back and forth!" she suppressed the fury she felt toward him, revealing it only in her tensed voice. "Five paces forward and five backward, what do you do, count them!"

He observed her with sardonic amusement. "It was quite annoying to me also, my sweet, when the habit was thrust upon me in the cell of the Inquisition. It seems the Holy Fathers care little for the comforts of their prisoners, the least of their worries being whether the wretch has room to walk in or not. The measurement of my cell, my dear, was five paces in any direction."

"Oh, my God," tears filled her eyes at her heartless remarks, "I'm sorry, Jamie, forgive me," she whispered.

"Do not dwell on it, Katy. All of us say things we wish we could recall. The words 'I'm sorry' are strangers upon the lips of some and come infrequently to the tongue. Come, sit down now and rest."

He helped her to the couch that had been brought in from his cabin and placed in front of the wide gallery windows where she could receive the benefit of the sun and fresh air. He handed her a book he had picked out for her, then offered her his apologies and left.

As Katy grew better Jamie's temper grew shorter with everyone except her. Jamie's attitude toward Katy was formal, distant and conventional. The crew murmured among themselves at the unprecedented change in their Captain. He was normally a strict disciplinarian, but now he expected the near impossible out of them.

Mr. Cruse watched him standing at the rail staring into the sea. The first mate had gone to him about the crew's complaints, but he had been told to handle them himself. The Captain's mind and heart were not committed to this

voyage. There was still another month to go before they would drop their cargo at Jamaica, then finding a new shipment and loading; it could be almost another month or so before they would reach Virginia. The reduction of the crew in battle put a strain on the remaining men. Some of the badly wounded were still in sick bay after two and a half months. They probably would never recover.

The Captain had changed their course several times as if prolonging the journey. The ship had gotten a late start, leaving England in the first days of February, because of the difficulty the Captain had gotten himself into over the Markley affair. Mr. Cruse had been surprised to find the young man locked up in his cabin in a drunken stupor over a slip of a girl. He had never let such things bother him. That is what happened to men who became enamoured with one special woman at a time, he surmised. He, it had been, who had suggested the understanding between the Captain (with Billy's help) and Mistress Kettle. He knew the Captain had visited her business establishment many times before in the past years and the arrangement had been easy to contract. But who would ever have believed that someone like the beauty below would show up? The Captain surely had his hands full now, being between a rock and a hard place. He was really fighting himself as everyone could see, and from the looks of it everybody, except the Captain, knew the lovely creature below had won out. He shrugged his shoulders, "Some men have all the luck," he told himself, "women, money, position, even if it does come from the wrong side of the blanket."

Chapter 7

The Captain's bold eyes lingered upon his lovely lady. The warm blush of health had returned highlighting the creamy smoothness of her complexion. Her eyes held the rich depths of perfect gems, casting viridescent sparks in the flickering candlelight. Small dimples played hide and seek in the corners of her moist, pink mouth, as her delightful laugh tinkled like the pure, clear notes of costly crystal in the soft warmth of the spring night.

Laughing and talking Jamie felt more relaxed than he had for weeks. He sipped the brandy often until Billy remarked about it, expecting to receive a rebuke on the spot.

Throwing back his head the Captain laughed, his deep voice filled with mirth and contentment. "If I am drunk, Billy, it is not from the brandy, but from the lovely company we have tonight." He smiled and raised the goblet to his lips, looking over the top of it into Katy's sparkling eyes.

Katy had been surprised earlier that evening when Jamie had requested her to dress in a special gown he had brought

to her. The white brocade fit snugly around her small waist; gathered pleats fell in graceful folds into the skirt; the wide sleeves billowed out at the elbows into scallops; the under-chemise sleeve fell just below, scalloped also; large white bows trimmed in gold satin decorated the wide sleeves just above the rounded edge; delicate Flemish filigree lace enriched the bodice running over the bosom and to the waist.

She came to the cabin door to ask Jamie for help with the buttons and saw Billy putting the last touches on an elaborately prepared table. Gleaming silver and sparkling crystal and china adorned a snow-white lace table covering.

"Are we having guests?"

"Nay, m'lady, jist ye and the Capt'n."

Puzzled, she had returned to the bedchamber until Jamie appeared. She could get no more information from him. He had led her to the table with great ado and much secrecy. Seating her, he had moved to his own seat and joined her. Billy had served them a delicious dinner, certainly far better than any they had had while at sea. "Baker has more than proven his worth as a cook tonight," she thought.

Now Jamie sat in a thoughtful mood devouring her with his eyes. Pouring an extra drink, he arose and handed the bubbling brew to Billy.

"To the most beautiful woman in the world," Jamie exclaimed smiling widely, saluting her with a flourishing lift of his hand.

"Amen," Billy echoed with a hearty agreement.

"Thank you, both of you, very much," she whispered shyly.

Jamie opened a long slender case and removed a necklace from it. Katy's eyes widened as she stared at the beautiful display of rubies and diamonds. A large pear-shaped ruby dangled from the exquisite golden necklace, arabesque designs in lacy filigree adorned with dozens of diamonds and rubies encircled the elaborate mesh. He fastened the elegant gift around her throat. His warm hands moved to her shoulders; she could feel the glow through the material. His

lips touched her below the ear. Katy looked at Billy nervously and he grinned at her. She bit at her lower lip in her discomfort.

"Jamie, I can't accept this."

He crossed to his chair and sat down. "Why not?"

"Because—I just can't."

He smiled dourly. "Because I took it from a Spanish ship?"

"Well—yes."

"The clothes you wear, madam, came from the same source. Does that mean you won't wear those either?" he asked in grim amusement.

She moved in the chair nervously, suddenly feeling trapped, and hating him for the sport he was making of the situation.

"Is there another reason, my sweet?"

Her head came up defiantly and she straightened her shoulders unconsciously, as if preparing herself for his ridicule.

"I was always taught that nice girls don't accept expensive gifts such as this." She met his eyes boldly.

He sipped at his brandy and held her gaze. The silence lingered, her gaze faltered.

"What am I supposed to reply to that remark?" he asked caustically.

She lowered her eyes and stared at her tightly closed hands.

"I wanted this evening to be special. A sort of celebration for your recovery. Do not spoil it, Katy, by being a slave to convention. Wear the necklace tonight to please me and for no other reason. There are no bargains being proposed," he told her gently.

She relaxed and smiled wanly at him and then at Billy who stood several feet away watching the by play in silence. Jamie crossed his long legs and contemplated his boots, then looking up at her with his usual arrogant pride, cast the

off-handed barb, "I never bargain with women, but then with most of them I don't have to."

She felt the anger rise within her. "And I suppose he casts me in that catagory with the rest of his whores," she thought. "Well, Captain Bartlett, we shall see whether you bargain or not."

A plan began to ferment in her mind. He wanted her, each bold look given her revealed that fact, so she would play the game with him. If she could reach his Achilles' heel just once and leave him wanting and unfilled she would be victorious and satisfied. And so the game began.

Jamie was pleasantly surprised at the change in Katy's attitude. She raised her glass several times to be refilled with wine. Her laughter rang in happiness and she flung loving glances at him when she thought he wasn't watching. His pulses quickened at her warm regard and enchanting attention. She seemed to be fascinated by his charming company and he went out of his way to keep her entertained. He and Billy traded stories of their adventures aboard the Hawk and she hung on to every word, asking questions here and there to encourage their yarns. The hour grew late but she was still bubbling with enthusiasm.

Katy's wine seemed to have gone to her head and she seemed to bubble as the wine did. She was breathtakingly beautiful. The white brocade gown was cut low exposing her lovely bosom, which had the appearance of two soft, white doves nesting just within the bodice. The elegant necklace encircled her long graceful neck. The large ruby reminded Jamie of a red teardrop and as the brandy began to work its magic upon his muddled brain he watched the crimson tearlet linger at the crest of the delightful alabaster valley as if savouring the joy of the plunge below.

Katy felt the fixed stare of the slightly inebriated man upon her half bared breast and a pink tinge escaped from beneath the décolletage. She squirmed in her chair at his regard, then looked at Billy to see if he was aware of the stark

desire graven on Jamie's hawk-like features, but Billy was already beginning his chore of cleaning up.

Jamie drew in a sharp breath at her movement. The already revealing bodice had now slipped to one side exposing more of the dove-white mound. His hand shook as he raised the glass to his lips.

She was suddenly aware of the power she possessed over him. If she could just keep him drinking, she reasoned to herself, maybe he would succumb to the persuasion of the alcohol and all would be well with her this night; so she continued to flirt and laugh at his besotted endeavours at jocosity, feeling a new surge of unknown strength flow within her. In his frustration, Jamie resumed his drinking. His eyes darkened when he finally recognised what she was doing. Katy could see the anger building in the back of his narrowed lour and her newly found power faltered.

"May I be excused, m'lord? I grow weary."

"Yes, my sweet, by all means. Billy, you may go."

Billy hesitated; sensing a sudden change in the atmosphere, he looked from one to the other, then assured himself he must have imagined it. Except for the tired lines etched around Katy's mouth and eyes and the paleness which had crept over her face just seconds ago there appeared to be no change in the couple.

"Goodnight, Mistress, Capt'n," he bowed from one to the other and left.

Katy fled into the bedchamber deciding to give up her course of action. She clasped her hands, trying to still them. The forceful face of the Captain rose within the vision of her closed eyes and the trembling began anew. His overwhelming dominance weakened her reserve. She saw in her imagination his smile of ridicule at her weakness. Amusement glinted in his eyes as she stood obedient and submissive before him. Stirred emotions became a vortex of fervent anger. She longed to show him she possessed a hidden reservoir of strength, that she was more than a half-starved backbone that crumbled under the first sign of a black cloud.

Stubborn determination aroused, the whirling turbulence gave her the courage needed to continue her course.

Jamie came up behind her and put his hands on her shoulders. He ran his fingers through her hair, releasing it. All the while his lips caressed her throat and the side of her face. His arms slipped around her waist and he pulled her against him.

At his first touch she stiffened. "Relax, my sweet, surely all the extra trouble you have gone to tonight is for my benefit. Let us not let it go to waste."

She pushed his hands away and moved from him. "But it will go to waste, m'lord."

"I have asked you not to call me that," he said harshly.

She turned to face him defiantly, "Why? It gives me pleasure, *m'lord*. Besides you have never *asked* me for anything, you have taken and you have demanded, but never have you asked."

"Would it give you pleasure if I *begged*?" he sneered, his eyes gleaming darkly. "Then for your pleasure, madam, I am *begging* you not call me by that vile title." His voice thickened with malice.

"Yes—"

"If you say m'lord one more time I shall cheerfully strangle you." He advanced toward her, his mask tightly in place. "Once I called you innocent, but no longer; you have learned to play the game only too well, my little inamorata. So if you want to play, we will play."

"There will be no games tonight, Captain. I am my own master and I will do as I will do," she told him coldly.

"There is only one master aboard this ship and I have never had a mutiny, nor will rebellion be born in this bedroom."

Panic gripped her as she beheld the mounting fury building in his darkened gaze at her impertinence. She knew the situation had slipped through her fingers, but was baffled as to how her plight had changed so suddenly.

"If you touch me, I'll—I'll scream."

He threw back his head and laughed shortly. "My dear Katy," he told her, a leer masking his face, "my crew knows they enter this cabin only by invitation from the Captain, not by a woman's scream."

He stood with legs spread, hands on hips and a mocking smile upon his face.

"You must remember, my sweet, you are the one who started this little game and now that it is not going your way you want to gather up your playthings and go home. There is only one problem: this kind of sport is played by my rules," his thumb thrust at his chest, "and the goal has not yet been achieved." He advanced slowly towards her as he spoke in his low, caustic voice. She retreated until she was backed into the wall.

"You have really had an enjoyable time tonight, have you not, my sweet?" he demanded leaning close to her face. "You have flirted and flashed your emerald eyes and teased and taunted me with your damnable loveliness all evening, and you expect no payment in return?" His blazing eyes held hers forcefully. "Madam, I always pay my debts, some more promptly than others, nevertheless, all are reimbursed in full."

She drew herself up angrily, her voice trembling, "I don't intend to play any games, tonight or ever."

"Ah, my beautiful Katy, you are so lovely, but when you are angry—" he kissed the tips of his fingers. While smiling at her with his diabolical smile, his hands slid behind her and she could feel his fingers working at the buttons of her gown. She knocked his hands away and turned to escape; he grabbed at her, his hands clutching at her dress instead. The shoulder seam parted and hung loosely. Anger flamed from his eyes as he jerked her to him. His mouth descended upon hers, demanding and claiming his privilege. She struggled against him with feet and tightly clenched hands. He only laughed. He caught her foot between his knees and captured her flailing hands behind her, his smile widened at her defeat.

She tried to calm the surging responses racing through her. With pulses pounding madly, all resolve and high ideals retreating, she surrendered to him. Smiling his cynical smile, he recognised her submission.

"Has no one ever told you that woman was created for man's pleasure?" he murmured softly in her ear.

Her muffled voice sounded against his chest. "Damn you! You savage swine, I hate you!" She let her head fall forward, hair tumbling about in wild disarray, covering her shame as he slipped the torn garment from her. Quickly his clothes joined hers in a disordered pile. He carried her to the softly lit bed where the downy folds embraced their bodies until at last Katy offered no resistance. His mouth claimed hers once more, plundering and stripping her of self-esteem. An inner battle raged to restrain the faltering emotions.

"Are you just going to lie there?" he demanded angrily.

"Yes, m'lord," she replied defiantly.

The glower grew darker, "Suit yourself. I have been a patient man, but I will have my way," he told her cruelly.

"Of course, you will, my—"

He placed his hand on her throat, cutting off the slur. "Say it. I think at this moment I would strangle you."

His lips felt hard and unyielding as they moved over her. She tried to turn from him, but he seized her hair holding her face against his. His rigid features were unrelenting and stamped in naked lust. Her flesh felt scorched as he covered her body with his own. His desire and anger were fulfilled in primitive fury. Katy felt as if every thrust was a savage blow. She wondered which of them he was trying to punish; her body ached from the inhuman ferocity.

Later, he paced in his anger before her as she lay watching him fearfully.

"God's eyes, girl! What am I to do with you? Am I so repugnant to your sight? From the moment I laid eyes on you I knew that you had to be mine. Was that so wrong of me! I have tried to make amends for that—that first night when I

thought you were—" His voice trailed off.

"A whore, Jamie? What difference does it make now, for that is what I have become."

"Nonsense!"

"You use me as one."

"But I don't want to! You are like intoxicating wine to me. I drink and drink until I am filled, but must keep coming back to sample the bottle." He ran his hand through his hair in frustration. "Do you think I want it to be like this?" He turned from her angrily, then whirled around again. "You leave me no choice! God above!—to think that I promised myself I would never let another woman get her claws into me again—if we weren't out in the middle of the ocean—Hell, why fool myself, I can never rid myself of you."

"Oh, Father, never once has he mentioned love. What must I do? I want him to love me." She cried to herself. "If he puts me aside, I'll kill myself."

"Do not get any ideas in your head, madam, for I will not crawl for your favours. Is that what you are waiting for? Is that why you are warm one moment and cold the next?" he bent over her and asked through clenched teeth.

Fearfully she pushed herself to the head of the bed, drawing her legs up against her chest, pulling the quilt tightly beneath her chin. Terrified, she shook her head. Never had she seen such fury in one person.

"Hell will freeze over first! Billy said you loved me. Fool that I am, I believed him. Yes, even in the beginning I thought you were starting to care, but I see no sign of it now. Even earlier in the evening I was deceived. What woman can you trust! From the very beginning, woman has been nothing but a temptress and liar, but what does man continue to do—why we join in her little games and dance to her seductive music and end up by making complete asses of ourselves. No wonder my father leaves bastards everywhere he goes; perhaps he has the correct idea after all. Drop your breeches, give them what they want and leave them, never looking back!" he whispered hoarsely.

He had worked himself into such a frenzy the vein in his forehead jutted out. The tension in the room was so great the air felt too heavy to breathe. Suddenly he picked up a bottle from the commode, hurling it against the wall. The glass exploded and brandy spurted halfway across the room. He watched the liquor drip down the wall, then cursed.

"What a damnable waste. It would have done more good inside me," he growled.

Stamping into the outer cabin he emerged with another decanter. He handed a full glass to Katy.

"No, thank you."

"Drink it! We may as well enjoy ourselves one way or another, for I do not intend to leave this room until we come to an understanding." He tipped the bottle and drank deeply; wiping his chin with the back of his hand, he poured more brandy into her cup. "Drink, my sweet, maybe brandy will melt that icy heart of yours, God knows I can not seem to do it." He threw himself into the chair beside the bed.

He sat and watched her through those brooding eyes of his. Time after time he tilted the bottle and drank, pouring more for Katy, making her drink until her head felt light and fuzzy.

"Please, don't do that."

"Do what?" he demanded.

"Sit and stare at me."

"You would take all the pleasures out of life, wouldn't you?" he snarled.

Her nerves felt at the breaking point. She wanted to get out of the room and away from those demonic eyes.

He laughed softly, coarsely. "Where would you run, my love? Naked as a newborn babe, what chance would you have among a crew of women-hungry pirates?" He lowered his voice to a lewd whisper. "Men with no scruples at all. Do you know where I got them? From prison. They are the scum of the earth, according to the authorities, for there is no crime they have not committed, but they obey me and their loyalty is to me." He struck his chest with his fist. He smiled

at her with that horrible grimace she so feared and hated. "Do you have any idea what it would be like among men who have not a woman for—" he looked at the ceiling as if figuring, "about one hundred nights? Do you know what sailors think about on long, lonely nights at sea, such as tonight when they know their Captain is having such an enjoyable evening with his beautiful doxy?" His voice dripped with irony. "Would you like me to describe it for you?" His voice cut her like cold, stinging sleet.

"Oh, please, please, no more. I beg of you. Do what you will with me. I'll fight you no more." She shuddered as the mental picture he painted for her took shape in her anguished mind. She covered her ears to shut out his insinuating voice.

He stood over her boldly with his hands on his hips, commandingly, "Katy, there will be peace between us. As I said before there can only be one master on this ship and that position is mine. There will be no more games or deceit between us. Men sometimes brand their slaves and cruel as it sounds, you wear my brand just as I wear yours. I can not even think of going through life without you. If I believed in a God I would pray to Him that someday you might feel the same way. Until that time, things will and must continue between us as they are. I have never been the kindest of men, nor the most gentle. I take what I want, as you know. I will try to be different, only because I would like to please you, but I will not beg for what is already mine!"

Her eyes flashed at the suggestion of possession. "Have I nothing to say in the matter? Or am I truly the slave you speak of?"

"Of course, you are not a slave," he told her impatiently.

"Then when we get to Jamaica, put me ashore."

"Nonsense, where would you go, what would you do?"

"You have been kind enough to teach me a trade."

For a scant moment time stood still as the words beat upon his brain with the rhythmic thump of his wrath-filled heart. His eyes became dark, angry pits of hate. He made a low, animal sound in his throat and sprang at her. Katy cried

out and shrank back. His hard fingers bit into her arms as he tried to pull her to him. His face was livid with fury, his burning eyes met hers with a hellish gleam. White teeth flashed in a savage snarl as he cursed her contemptuously. She kicked at him wildly, her breath coming in frightened, rasping gasps. One furious kick and his hold was broken on her bruised arms. As he reached for her once more, she pushed herself toward the top of the bed again. He made a lunge at her and she moved backwards quickly, her shoulder struck the commode and the decanter rocked back and forth. She unconsciously grabbed for it. As his hands seized her again she swung the empty bottle; glass shattered around Jamie, blood spurted from his head and he crumpled across the bed.

Katy sat transfixed with horror at the scene before her. The bloody splotch at her knee grew slowly larger until there was a small puddle. She felt the warmth spread around her thigh, then saw the crimson stain against her white flesh. Somewhere as if in the background, she could hear someone screaming.

Billy burst into the room with Mr. Cruse and several other men at his heels. When Billy beheld the spectacle on the bed, he ordered the men to wait outside.

"M'lady!" He took her arm and shook her, but the wailing persisted. "Katy!" he cried, then not knowing what else to do, slapped her. The hysterical din was suddenly pinched off, then she began crying. He shook her again. "Katy, git dressed, the crew will be awantin' t' know what the trouble is."

Dazed, she slowly recognised her nakedness and drew the coverlet up over her. "Never ye mind about that, lassy. I have no time t' be watchin' ye. Jist git dressed."

While she hurried into a dress, Billy was trying to stanch the flow of blood. She stood by panting in distress.

"Is—is he dead, Billy?" she sobbed.

"Nay, but I canna stop the bleedin'. Git the first mate. Quickly, girl!" he urged impatiently.

She ran to the door and jerked it open. "Mr. Cruse, please hurry!"

Katy was unprepared for the frontal assault from the tall, gaunt man. At her urgent words, he rushed across the room to the door, hardly noticing she was anything except a barrier in his path, brushing her none too gently aside, hurried to the side of his captain and friend.

Billy paused in his ministration only long enough to raise his worried eyes to the man across the bed from him. "Mr. Cruse, would ye be knowin' how t' cauterize a wound?"

"Aye, of a sort."

"Then be gittin' what ye need, and hurry, before we be losin' himself." He held the wadded sheet against the wound, watching it slowly turn crimson.

Mr. Cruse ran out of the room shouting instructions. Soon all the equipment needed was brought in.

Katy sat drawn up into a small ball in the corner. She was deathly white. Rocking back and forth, she kept repeating, "Oh, God, don't let him die, don't let him die."

She watched horrified as the first mate removed the white, hot poker from the brazier and spat upon it. The sizzle broke the silence.

"Hold him down, men, hold his head! Don't let him move, not even an inch! Steady, now."

The poker descended and Jamie let out an awful scream that pierced Katy's heart like a knife. His body arched off the bed, then fell back. She could smell the sweet sickening odour of burnt flesh and gagged. Dropping her head back upon her drawn-up knees, she commenced rocking back and forth, moaning.

"It looks good, Mr. Cruse. The bleedin' be stopped. It's a headache he'll be havin' fer a few days and afterwards a scar, but other than that the Capt'n will be right as rain." Turning his head, he looked at Katy. "'Tis herself I be worried about."

"What the hell happened in here?"

"The good Lord only knows. But from the looks a'things,

I'd say the bonny, little lass brained our young, stalwart captain with his brandy bottle," Billy grinned at the first mate. Then turning serious, he viewed the silent man on the bed. "Will ye be helpin' me to move 'im over to the couch, Mr. Cruse, and I'll be changin' the bed befer someone gits cut."

They carried Jamie to the couch and made him as comfortable as possible, then the first mate left to answer the crew's questions. Billy watched Katy out of the corner of his eye as he remade the bed and straightened up the cabin but there was no change in her. She was still keening softly to herself in the corner. Billy finally went to her and helped her to bed.

"Mistress, don't take on so, the Capt'n'll be all right."

"Billy, I've killed him."

"Nay, nay. He's still alive. If y'ad hit 'im anywhere but in the head, y' might've, but ye can't kill a Bartlett by brainin' 'im. Kin ye be tellin' me what happened?"

"It was dreadful, we had a terrible quarrel, and he said such horrible things to me." Then in disjointed sentences Katy told Billy what had transpired.

Billy couldn't believe his ears. This was not the captain and master he knew. Surely the girl was exaggerating. She made the captain sound like a monster, instead of the gentleman he knew him to be. Could lust and jealousy so change a person? He longed to comfort Katy, but would only allow himself to pat her on the hand and reassure her that Jamie did love her and ere long he would know it himself. With the comforting presence of the gentle man nearby, Katy soon drifted off into a restless sleep. Billy turned down the lamp and resigned himself to finding his ease in one of the large chairs for the night.

The next few days were pressing ones for the seaman. Jamie ran a high fever and was delirious most of the time and Katy was beside herself with worry.

Jamie rambled on about everything from his younger days as a buccaneer to their long intimate nights, which

humiliated Katy whether Billy was with her or not. He strayed from one subject to another in his delirious wanderings; refighting battles on the sea and in the bed until Katy could stand the humiliation no longer, sweeping out of the room with blazing face and cold fury. She could hardly bring herself to look Billy in the eye. He went his way acting as if he heard nothing.

The last day of Jamie's delirium Billy appeared at the door, "Mistress, come quickly."

Jamie was thrashing around on the bed. He was muttering and his voice would rise in volume and then fall into a muttered whisper.

"Katy—forgive—" She strained to understand the garbled words. "—but—love you,—mustn't—makes a man—weakened milksop. God help me—love you. Katy—Katy—don't go—Katy—" he tried to sit up but Billy grabbed his shoulders firmly and held him down.

Katy clutched the door frame and held on, unable to believe her ears. It couldn't be true. All of the terrible things he had said to her that night—those horrible, wrenching words still beat against her brain and heart and now this! No! He had said there would be no more deceit between them and now he was trying to seduce her mind into believing he loved her! "It's a trick," she whispered, "he's not sick now and he's just trying to ridicule me again."

"See, mum, I told ye he loved ye." Billy told her triumphantly.

"No! It's a lie!" she cried in agitation. Her hands clasped the sides of her face as she forced the tears back. "I told you everything he said and how he behaved. I don't believe it." She whirled to go back into the outer cabin. Suddenly the room revolved and blackness overwhelmed her.

Billy carried Katy to the couch and began slapping her wrists. He wet a cloth and sponged her face until she moved.

"What happened?" she asked weakly.

"Ye fainted."

"Nonsense, why would I do that?"

"I think ye know why as well as I do, mum."

"What do you mean?"

"The reason will soon be plain fer all to see. That ye carry the Capt'n's child."

"You know?"

"Aye."

"For how long?"

"Since ye were ill. Jamie isn't the only one to talk when delirious, ye know."

"Does Jamie know?" Billy shook his head. "You won't tell him will you, Billy? Promise me you won't tell him." She grabbed his hand, imprisoning it. "Please, Billy, promise me."

"He'll never forgive either of us if he isn't told."

"I will tell him—when he tells me he loves me."

"But y' heard 'im say it, mum."

"Nay, I mean to me. When he knows what he is saying. Please, Billy, you said he loves me and that he will tell me so one day. When that day comes, and he reveals his heart and love to me, then I will tell him about his child, but you must promise to let me do it."

The earnest pleading in Katy's eyes melted any protest he might have made in the Captain's behalf. "I promise," he muttered reluctantly.

She kissed the back of his rough hand. "Thank you."

Billy hurried out of the room, concerned by the frustrations of this beautiful woman.

Jamie soon mended and was on his feet quickly. His attitude was cold and harsh and she dreaded to be alone with him. He never mentioned what had happened between them, indeed, there was no need; the scar on his forehead reminded her in a blazing slash everytime she saw him. Her heart lay cold and heavy in her breast. How was she to tell him of the child she carried when he no longer talked with her except to make polite conversation? He now made his bed on deck or with the crew, taking his meals with his companions also.

She saw him only when he came below to change his clothes or when she took her leisure beneath the canopy which offered succor and comfort in many things except a broken heart.

Only moments before she had fled the quarter-deck to avoid the cold, piercing eyes which now seemed to follow her wherever she went.

Topside, her mind had sought refuge in happier memories, happier days. She had been content for those few moments in her reverie until a forceful intruder had invaded the tender tokens of happiness and cast the seeds of confusion upon her.

Dazed, she searched the deck for the interloper. The Captain had come upon deck and was now leaning nonchalantly against the gunwale watching her with a narrow frown. His mood matched his garb and Katy shivered from the icy stare. Her heart commenced to race and a clammy sweat bathed her. Her mind reached back to *that* night, and visions of the horrible scene passed before her.

"No," she protested silently, "am I more guilty than he?"

"You nearly killed him," her mind accused.

"What do you think he was trying to do to me?" her heart wailed.

"You seem bent upon murder to plague you in this life and the next."

"Leave me alone, please!"

With a cry of dismay she arose and fled below to the cabin. Now she lay on the couch in front of the window, morosely watching the calm of the sea, while her emotions continued to buffet her.

Would he really put her ashore in Jamaica as she had demanded? Would he hate her if he knew about his child? Or would he keep her a prisoner until the babe was born and then cast her aside scornfully? So many questions beat against her brain demanding an answer.

"If it wasn't for the child, I think I would hurl myself into the waters," she murmured. She took up the book again and

tried to read but found concentration eluded her. The volume dropped unheeded to the floor. Tears flowed and she became angered with herself as it seemed the tears came too easily these days. She despised weakness especially in herself for she had always thought herself weak. One of the reasons she loved Jamie so much was his stalwartness and strength of will, even though these same qualities of strength sent her into a panic and cowed her into submission.

A mental picture of him formed in her mind. He stood as she had often envisioned him, straight and tall in the wind; his raven hair blowing freely in the breeze and his dark eyes looking down on her with love and tenderness; naked to the waist, his arms embraced her and held her closely. She could almost feel the strength of him and she sighed. She missed his touch, his caress and especially his lips. Even when they were accompanied with scorn and mockery they were welcome.

"You fool," she jeered, "do you delight in pain? Why plague yourself constantly? You know your position in his life, he has always made that quite plain to you, yet you sit here and dream like a starry-eyed child. He wants someone to bear him brave and strong sons. How could he ever love one so cowardly?" She tried to push the melancholy mood away. "Oh, God, I love him so."

She closed her eyes again. She would picture him without that damnable derisive mask. She would picture him with that rare boyish smile that made him appear godlike to her adoring eyes. She would picture her child in his likeness.

Suddenly the babe leaped and she gasped in delight. She held her belly hopefully. "He will be like his father," she told herself, "only gentle and kind. He will have no need to hide his feelings behind a cold, dark scowl. He will have a free spirit, not one shut up in a cold, unloving heart."

"Are you in pain, madam?" his deep voice spoke from the doorway.

She started at his voice and her body tensed as he moved toward her.

"No, there is no pain." She hastily assured him.

He moved to the stern windows and put his booted foot on the seat and watched the waves. The silence between them was overwhelming, Katy felt it rise around her in a stifling mantle and wanted to cry out in protest. The pulse in her throat pounded and her heart joined in. She watched him warily, wondering what he was thinking. Finally, he turned to her. She was surprised and delighted that his face was gentle.

"Katy, I want to apologise to you for everything." She opened her mouth to interrupt. "No, please, hear me out. This is a very difficult task for me, as I was always taught never to apologise for anything, for it is the mark of the inferior; but I have been giving our situation serious consideration and find that I do owe you a redress. It was a foolish idea in the first place to bring you or any woman with me, and I am truly sorry it turned out to be you."

Her heart felt as if it were breaking. She got up and turned her back to him so he wouldn't see the anguish his words wrought. "'Tis I who owe you recompense, I nearly killed you."

He laughed bitterly, "No more than I deserved." After a long silence he continued. "Things have gone badly between us. I had hoped it would be different." He cleared his throat and moved away from the gallery and began pacing. "I had hoped we could make an understanding between us, but it seems my demands are too great and your needs are too small."

She was afraid of his next words, so her reply was in anger. "What difference have my needs ever made? As long as you own me, you can do with me as you will."

Annoyance flared, but he smothered it and continued. "I think it would be best to do as you demand and put you ashore in Jamaica. Of course, I will see that you are well provided for."

"Of course, you will." She replied tonelessly.

A frown creased his forehead. "What do you mean, I own you?"

"Billy said . . ."

"I don't give a damn what Billy said!" he snapped, then hesitated, "yet maybe . . . Is that what has been gnawing at you all this time? You think that it is because I own you that I . . ." He gestured toward the bed.

She raised her eyes and glared at him.

A short laugh sounded in his throat and he shook his head, "I can't believe it. *That* is what has caused all this turmoil? From what realm of hell would Billy get an idea such as that?"

After a few moments of thought, "The other girl! Of course, the one who was supposed to come with me. For certain—considerations—to console me in my moments of grief, so to speak, I was to take her to her uncle in Jamaica. Her papers said she was my indentured servant, but I would have released her once we reached the island. God's shining crown, girl, is that what has been troubling you?"

Feeling tears of anger welling, Katy cast her eyes downward, nodding.

He threw back his head and laughed. "I should have Billy flogged for his big mouth. Good Lord, woman, I don't want you for a servant, I have dozens of slaves in Virginia that jump at my slightest whim. I want you for my wife!"

Katy's hands flew to her mouth and her eyes widened in complete surprise and disbelief. "Your—your wife?"

"Yes, you little fool, for my wife. I love you. Surely you know that."

She shook her head, stunned.

"I have tried to tell you, to show you. Do you think I would bed you and make love to you as I have done and not love you? Oh, I have used women to relieve my frustrations, even as I used you in the beginning. But of late, there has been a difference. I have never felt guilty with the others, but with you—everytime I touch you I feel as if I have defiled you. Let's face it, love, sexual frustrations do not beset a man on a daily or nightly course just for the sake of relief. I became addicted to the cherished persuasion found in your

protesting arms. Then I was determined that you would find that same assuaging need. When I failed, I found I could no longer control myself, for you had become a necessity in my life."

His voice broke and he found himself unable to continue. Fear was a stranger to him, but now made itself an unwelcome guest in the pit of his stomach.

"I love you, Katy, and I want you to love me. I know you must hate me; God knows you certainly have reason enough." His voice slowed and dropped to a whisper. "Katy, do—you think there could ever be a chance—that you could love me?"

Slowly her face crumbled and she sank to the floor. He rushed across the room and knelt beside her, pulling her to him. Brushing her hair back from the beloved face he kissed her tenderly. "What is it, lass?"

"I have waited so long to hear you say it."

"Say what?"

"That you love me," she sighed.

"Of course, I do. I have tried to show you in every way I know."

"Oh, Jamie, I love you so much."

"Then why haven't you told me?"

"I was afraid you would laugh at me. You could have told me, you know," she insisted.

"But I have—many times. I know I have told you I can't live without you."

"I thought that was lust speaking, not love. I have prayed that you might love me."

"Prayer has had nothing to do with my feelings toward you," his voice hardened for the moment. As he beheld her lovely, dewy face his voice softened once more. "From the moment I recognised that you were truly an innocent, unassuming woman with the trust and sincerity of a child I think I began to love you."

"I thought you hated me," her mouth trembled.

"I knew that you hated me, you certainly told me often

enough." His eyes swept her face again and again as if committing each tiny detail to memory. His hand touched the side of her face lovingly as his lips lightly brushed hers.

"God, what a fool I have been. Never have I met a woman like you," he whispered. "I am almost afraid to touch you any more, for every time I do I hurt you. And I don't want to hurt you, Katy," he raised her hand to his mouth and planted a gentle kiss inside the soft palm. Her hand touched his cheek adoringly and he met it again with warm, affectionate lips.

"It seems as if everytime I try to tell you or show you just how much I love you I blunder through it and end up by making a fool of myself. I have never met anyone like you before." He laughed with embarrassment. "Would you believe me if I told you that you frighten me?"

"I frighten you?"

"Yes, little one, you do. I know how to treat most women. I even know how to be a gentleman, believe it or not. But with you—" he shook his head in bemusement. "Everytime I get around you—everything I say or do turns upside-down." With his arms still around her and his lips on hers, he slowly stood up.

"Katy, Katy," he whispered into her ear, "I have tried so many times to tell you how I feel about you. Even when you were so ill I tried, but the words just seemed to freeze in my throat. I felt so guilty—as if it were my fault."

A coy smile played upon her lips, "And well you should have, for it was your fault."

He frowned, not wanting to believe her cruel words. His hands fell away from her to his side, "But how? I did everything I knew to take care of you."

"I believe it is called morning sickness, my love," she smiled, looking up at him through her lashes teasingly.

Amazement crossed his face. "Morning sickness—do you mean—"

"Yes, Jamie. I carry your child. He quickened just as you came in the door. Feel, Jamie, he moves again."

His large hand covered her belly and a look of

wonderment passed his face as the child stirred again. He picked her up, laughing happily.

"I told you once before, you never cease to amaze me, and now is no exception. A son!" His dark face lighted up from an inner glow. "God! Katy, I'm going to have a son." His eyes touched her lovingly. "We're going to have a son!"

Laughingly, he whirled her around the room. Their laughter blending together. Then they collapsed on the bed.

"I love you, Katy Coswell, I adore you." he looked deeply into her eyes, smiling gently and kissed her eyes, the tip of her nose and the corners of her mouth. "We must be married as soon as we reach Jamaica, for I will not have my son born a bastard as his father was."

His lips descended upon hers with a tender passion. As their lips met and their bodies melted together, love plunged them into a baptism of searing fire, fusing their souls together in an unearthly oneness.

Part Two
JAMAICA

Chapter 8

Over the next few weeks Jamie's nature mellowed. Katy couldn't believe the change in him; for the first time she saw him as a gentle, sensitive man. He appeared at ease, not only with her and the crew, but with himself. The grimness around his mouth relaxed and the scowl she so feared faded into memory.

Katy never knew such happiness existed. Her love for him grew with each hour and each embrace. Love burst within her on swelling tides and sent intoxicating bubbles of joy simmering through her. Smiling lips now broke easily into song. Enchanted eyes would seek his and return the warm caress imparted from that now gentled gaze.

The crew watched the change come over the Captain with delight. His robust laughter filled the air; he laughed and joked with them once more and the feeling of camaraderie which had been missing for so long returned.

Katy resented the moments stolen from her by the crew.

Even when Jamie's attention was diverted by the Hawk, irritation chafed her.

One late afternoon when he returned after spending the day topside, she greeted him fervently as if he were just returning from a long separation. As their lips parted, Jamie chuckled and shook his head in bemusement.

"And to think I used to call you my little Ice Maiden."

He ran his hand gently across her cheek, pushing the fiery strands back. Then cupping her glowing face in both his hands, soft lips touched hers lightly.

"My beautiful Katy." He whispered.

Katy's breath seemed to catch in her throat. His eyes had gentled and gazed upon her in a new light. A profoundly tender affection swept over him, leaving him breathless. Jamie's lips met hers once more and sampled the dewy sweetness found there. Awakened love honeyed the taste of that now freely given favor. He traced the known path across her face and down her throat. His breath felt warm against her skin. As his arms held her more tightly she lowered her head contentedly against his chest. She could hear the wild thudding beneath her ear. His breath came in a controlled strain and he felt the need to swallow almost continually.

She glanced up at him and smiled shyly.

A smile broke his lips and the depression in his cheek appeared momentarily. He looked at her in mock anger, "You little witch, it pleases you to see the spell you have woven around me, does it not?"

"Aye, it pleases me," she whispered.

She captured his hand and placed it over her own fluttering heart. "Does it please you, my love, to know that you weave the same madness around me?"

His fingertips traced up her throat lightly and rested beneath her chin, holding her face tilted upwards. She found herself looking into soft velvety pools that had the power to devour her, leaving her weak and defenseless.

"Katy—" his voice broke and as he moved his fingers against her throat she felt them tremble. Her eyes glistened

and a lone teardrop slipped down her cheek and splashed on his hand. He watched a smile hesitate for a brief moment, then disappear. She raised her arms and clasped them around his neck as she hid her burning face against him.

"Love me, Jamie, please, love me," she whispered.

Elation flooded him as he swept her up in his arms. Still embarrassed, she pressed her face against his chest once more.

"Katy, look at me."

She turned her face away from the soft, woven shirt but still avoided his eyes.

"There is no shame in desire, Katy. The shame lies in the wanting and not asking," he paused watching her. "Do you love me?"

She raised puzzled eyes to his, "You know that I do."

"Then there should be no embarrassment between us."

She eyed him silently for a moment. "I'm sorry I displease you. I know naught how to overcome my weakness."

"Displease me! Nay, lass, I didn't mean that you displease me, to the contrary. Though it does toss me off the wind at times." He laughed softly. "'Tis refreshing to meet a modest and virtuous maiden—"

She stiffened in his arms then struggled for release. Surprise crossed his face and he tightened his hold on her. When she found the struggle futile she lay quietly. The green eyes held an icy glint.

"*You* should know better than anyone that I am neither virtuous nor a maiden."

His lips compressed into a thin line. "Must we continue to berate each other with the past? My choice of words was—unfortunate. Let the past be buried. I love you, Katy. To me you are a modest, virtuous maiden and always will be. If anyone else believes otherwise—even you—he will have to answer to me." His voice hardened and he set her on her feet, then moved away.

She stood subdued and silent. She felt his eyes on her and looked at him through her lashes. His hands were on his hips,

the long slender fingers spread widely; his sinewy legs encased in the black tight-fitting breeches were braced as if against a stormy sea, his face was impassive and offered her no explanation of his emotions. As the seconds ticked by Katy felt the anguish and distress of the moment rise upwards suffocating her; with a cry of dismay she crossed the floor quickly and threw herself against him.

"Jamie, Jamie, forgive me."

His arms enfolded her and he held her closely. His lips pressed her forehead. Her body shook as the sobs escaped against his chest.

"Sh-h. It is all right, Katy."

Unconsciously in her agitation she dug her fingers into his back, he grimaced as she hit a tender spot. Drawing the distraught hands to the front, he clasped them. Her fingers curled tightly around his thumbs. Feeling her sway he pulled her against him, releasing her hold on him. His arms enclosed the trembling, lithe body once more. As his hands moved up and down her bare arms she felt the trembling begin anew, but from a different emotion. He had but to touch her and every fiber quickened. Loving eyes met and she found herself engulfed in a deep impenetrable chasm. His eyes had softened to a sable velvety abyss that slowly drew her deeper and deeper into their warm dark crevasse. She longed to bask in the luxurious fathomless depths and float cloud-like ever deeper into that gentle, consuming mist. In a far distance a pulsating throb sounded and swelled. Beating—thumping—bursting—breaking—overflowing. She felt herself drawn into the swirling tempest of ecstasy and surrendered to the overwhelming gulf.

The embers of smoldering emotions flamed again as his mouth crushed upon hers. Soft arms crept around his neck and their bodies melted together as his hands covered her buttocks, pulling her up against him. She felt his steely torso mold itself to her pliable, yielding body. A small fire flickered in the pit of her stomach and quickly flamed sending forth its fervent tendrils. Mere flesh and blood

melted beneath the gentle yet unrestrained kneading of his hands. She felt as if she were the clay and he the potter, molding and shaping her to his will. An all-consuming flame raged through Katy. A small moan rose in her throat and she arched against him. Her arms crept tighter and she pulled his mouth closer; an overwhelming desire to become one with him possessed her.

Surprise marked its path for a scant second across Jamie's impassioned spirit. The Ice Maiden had dissolved, revealing beneath the thin veneer of ice a passionate, loving woman. Time was suspended as their enraptured emotions soared to a dizzying height.

His mouth ravished hers, the silent serpentine member of that awesome conspiracy darted hither and thither, touching here faintly, stabbing there, bringing an exquisite pang of delight. An imperceptible shiver shook Katy from head to heels and the strength of vitality and youth fled, leaving her weak and trembling.

With his mouth still upon hers, his eager arms swept her upwards and he moved to the bed. He lay her upon the feathery pallet and quickly undressed as his ardent eyes devoured her, stark desire sharpened his hawk-like features as he lowered himself slowly against her. His hardened thigh rested between her legs. Her left breast felt crushed beneath his powerful chest, yet the pain piercing through her brought pleasure in its stead.

His hand moved across her bodice slowly, unhooking the loops that enclosed the buttons with a dexterity that came from long practice. Soon she lay exposed to his avid gaze. The bed sagged with his weight as he stretched out beside her. His sun-browned body pressed against the milky-white, satiny curves, and his fingers traced the symmetrical perfection of the silhouette. She moved and twisted as his questing hands roamed at will. At last he pulled her beneath him; at the moment of their meeting the tides of desire burst around them in a great crescendo. Katy was suddenly thrust into a world of raging and stormy seas. As she was caught

upon an ascending wave of fiery delight, golden hues burst around her with their explosive splendours. The waves mounted higher and higher and the roaring grew louder in her ears. With one great swell the dam broke and a great mountain of pent-up fury illuminated around her and she released a soft cry and fell backwards, depleted and drained. She was hardly aware of the burden which bore her downward into the downy softness as Jamie rested upon her. His warm breath whispered against her ear as it rushed forth. His heart beat wildly against her ribs. At last, gathering strength, he pushed himself away and lay sprawled beside her.

A soft smile dimpled the corners of Katy's mouth as she watched him. His furry chest rose and fell heavily and his arm lay limply across his middle; his breath was still labored. A stubborn lock of hair had fallen across his forehead, her hand moved with a will of its own and lovingly pushed it back. Once more she found herself lost in the swirling depths. His white teeth gleamed against the swarthy face and his mustache bowed upward. Pulling her toward him he embraced her tenderly and gazed upon her silently, unwilling to break the bewitching enchantment that surrounded them.

As he continued his perusal, Katy could feel the warm glow tint her fair skin and she laid her cheek against his chest feeling the thick mat warm against her face. He smiled to himself contentedly, his hold tightened upon her momentarily. The sweet fragrance of her hair drifted around him and he buried his face in its silky softness. Katy snuggled against him, fulfilled and assuaged in his arms. A sense of peace and security enveloped her. Soon she slept.

In the weeks following the young lovers spent many delightful hours lying in each others arms discussing the future of their son.

"Why are you so sure it will be a son? Why not a daughter?"

"No! He will be a son!" Katy insisted stubbornly. "I saw him, the very likeness of you the day he quickened. No, my love, it is a son we shall have."

"I would be content with a daughter in the likeness of her mother," he teased, nibbling on her ear.

"We will think about a daughter later. Let us concentrate upon our son first. What shall we name him? After your fath—"

He cut her off quickly, pulling away abruptly and the long absent scowl returned. "Never after that bastard!" He barked.

"Jamie. Oh, Jamie, I am sorry." She threw her arms around his neck, pulling him down to her. "I always thought the first born was named after his paternal grandfather, especially in the aristocracy to distinguish the line."

Under her gentle persuasion his good nature returned slowly. "My love," he kissed the tip of her nose, "I disclaim all rights to nobility, although I am 'noble,' if you please, from both houses, which has never ceased to delight me," his voice deepened with satirical undertones. "My progenitor Adam de Barttelot came across the channel with the Duke William in 1066 and established himself heir to the estates of Stopham County of Sussex. I presume it was with this illustrious ancestor the Bartletts established the habit of taking whatever they desired and to hell with the fact it did not belong to them. My mother is Valentine de Sancé de Languedoc. True she is from a small province and of a minor house, but nonetheless noble." At the mention of his mother, Jamie's voice softened and his eyes gentled. "She was very lovely, they say; that I can believe for she still is, as a matter of fact, with her golden hair and deep blue eyes. She is a very lovely woman."

"Billy said Amelia had golden hair and blue eyes. Did she perhaps remind you of your mother?"

He sighed pensively, "I suppose that is why I became so enamoured of her. But love, nay, not love, not as I know love now." He waved the thought away impatiently. "At any rate,

Mother was betrothed to Phillip Bartlett, the second son of Richard. They were both very young and promised to one another from childhood. They fell in love at first sight and were married. Mother bore Phillip two daughters."

Katy turned onto her stomach and propped her chin upon her hands. "Are they pretty?"

"Who?"

"Your sisters, silly."

After a slight pause, as if considering the two young women, he nodded. "Yes, they are very pretty."

"What are their names?"

He grinned at her. His long, slender finger reached out and brushed the end of her nose. "Suzanne and Annette."

"Go on," she urged.

"One day, out of the blue, the eldest son, Thomas, arrived with his wife, Brigitte, a sickly witch who was constantly whining and whose jealous nature made all of their lives a living hell."

"Thomas—he's your father, isn't he?"

Jamie's jaw tightened and Katy watched the small muscle twitch. "Yes," his voice sounded thick, as if the word was forced out of a constricted area.

"Do you have any brothers?"

"Legitimate or illegitimate?" his voice hardened.

Katy didn't answer. She dropped her eyes and nervously picked at the edge of the pillow covering.

Jamie turned on his side. Reaching out he covered her hand with his. "I am sorry, Katy, I have no right to take my bitterness out on you. I have two brothers, Edmund and John. Brigitte was their mother."

A smile flitted across her lips and vanished. "Please, go on. I will try not to interrupt."

"I don't mind the interruptions." He leaned forward and kissed her on the forehead. "Thomas and his family had just returned from the New World where he had gone to make his fortune in life." A short laugh of sarcasm burst forth. "But his efforts were wasted, as usual. My sire's talents do not lie

in the realm of using his brains for pecuniary purposes. Grandfather was positive that both his talent and brains dwelt below his navel. I was always taught to never dispute my grandsire's words."

Katy turned on her side to watch the divergent reactions transverse his face, sharpening the features with a contemptuous demeanor.

"Grandfather had financed him in his endeavors and he lost it all because of his ignorance of finance. He was too stubborn to ask for assistance from anyone. The original grant reverted back to Grandfather plus six thousand acres the old man was able to salvage. Fortune's Fancy, he named it, for it was but another of my Father's idiotic fancies which took a fortune to maintain, and so it is still called today. Since Thomas could not reimburse the money loaned, Grandfather claimed the land, which is now mine. Thomas has since reclaimed the six thousand acres he purchased." He traced her profile with his finger and smiled soberly.

"Am I boring you, love?"

"No, please go on. I know only what little Billy has told me."

"So be it." He grinned. "In 1651 Phillip was called into Charles II's service as an emissary between the Scottish and French Courts. My Mother's family had strong political ties in the Louis XIV court and Charles' advisors felt that he could be of service to the Crown."

"But Charles wasn't King in England yet, was he?" Katy's forehead was furrowed in study.

"Nay, Cromwell still ruled England. If your tutor taught you well, you'll remember that Charles was declared King in Scotland in 1649, but not in England until 1660."

Katy nodded.

"My family has always been royalist and my Grandfather and his family had an exceptionally hard time while Phillip was in the service of the King. I can remember stories they told me as a child of the nights the Roundheads would nearly break the door down trying to catch up with Phillip as he

flitted in and out of the country one step ahead of Cromwell's agents. My Mother was still nursing Annette and could not go to France. Cromwell put a close guard on the manor trying to catch the wily husband. At this same time Thomas was having a difficult task trying to control Brigitte's violent temper and fits of jealousy. He thinks that every woman falls in love with him as soon as he comes into her presence. The asininity of the matter is that most of the time they do."

"Is he so handsome?"

A short laugh broke his lips as he viewed her with a satirical eye. "I know naught how to answer that question lest you think me vain. If you think me handsome, then my sire is, for I am his image."

"Then he is very handsome."

Jamie frowned and watched her for a brief moment before continuing. "You may never know the measure of those words."

"Doesn't he ever visit Fortune's Fancy?"

"Not if I can prevent it."

Katy felt uncomfortable whenever Jamie's father was mentioned. She could feel the animosity in his manner and hear it in his voice toward the shunned parent.

"Go on, Jamie, please."

"If it pleases you, love. Where was I—oh, yes, where M'Lord Thomas decided he was in love with Mother. He badgered her to death. Finally Mother could stand it no longer, for she was beginning to be enamoured of the 'handsome,'" his voice slurred the word as if it were obscene, "bastard and found herself unable to resist him much longer. She begged Grandfather to let her and the girls move into a small cottage not too far from the manor. Grandfather adored her and could deny her nothing. Of course, he thought it was from all the hell Brigitte was causing."

"Poor Brigitte, she must have been a terribly unhappy person."

"I believe the proper word is miserable. My sire has the

unmitigated capacity to drive a saint into the welcoming arms of Satan."

"Did your mother move?"

"Oh, yes, she moved, and Thomas being the egotistical devil that he was—and is, thought it was for his convenience and took to visiting her. Very subtly, you understand, and finally wormed his way into Mother's life. Women just seem to have no sense at all around him. After awhile he wore down her resistance and I am the result of that seduction," he said bitterly, crossing his arms across his broad, bronzed chest.

"They must have loved each other very much—I mean—to break the law—" her voice dwindled away.

"You mean to commit adultery, don't you?" A derisive glower settled across his face. "Let us call a spade a spade, shall we?"

A bitter curse broke his lips. "Love! To him she was just another conquest. When it came time for the accounting all he could think about was his damnable inheritance. He knew Grandfather would stand for no more of his indiscretions, especially when it concerned Mother. So M'Lord Thomas helped her to escape to France and try to convince Phillip that I was his son."

The loathing in his voice tore at Katy's heart and she longed to comfort him. The loving look she cast at Jamie was lost to him as he was caught up in his bitter remembrances.

A deep scornful laugh escaped him. "But fate had dealt them all a bantling blow. Phillip was also another pleasure-seeking Bartlett; in the years he had spent away from home and while Mother was dallying with Thomas, he had been sampling the tender affections of the females of Louis' court. Somewhere along his amorous journey he had contracted the French Pox. At least, he had enough affection and decency to tell her the truth and not touch her. Everyone in court knew of his sickness; soon Mother's condition was known to all as well. One question remained unanswered:

who was the father? When Grandfather found out about the unwanted child he was beside himself with worry; he still thought Phillip was my father."

Tears welled in Katy's eyes as she envisioned the dark haired babe unwanted and uncared for by warm motherly hands. Suckled at a stranger's breast, wailing and yearning for the warmth and nourishment at his own maternal paps. Then later, a small child wandering alone and lost amidst the busy goings and comings of cold and uncaring household servants. Her empty arms longed to gather that unloved waif to her bosom and shower him with the pent-up love stored within her own heart. Suddenly she gasped as a thin, long-legged, red-haired girl darted across her mind.

Jamie's attention turned to her at the sigh. Bemused, he searched her face, wondering what had caused the saddened look upon it. His finger captured a tear which slowly sought a pathway downward.

"What is it, Katy? Surely there is nothing in this tale of frail, erring human fools to warrant tears, even from a soul as gentle as yours."

She smiled at him through the dewy wetness which bathed her face, "I but thought of the wee unwanted one and longed to cradle and love him."

A frown creased his forehead and his hand covered her belly, "Unwanted?"

Katy laughed. "Nay, love, not our wee one. No baby has been wanted as much as ours. You, Jamie, I speak of you."

A roguish smile lit his face.

"If I had been there, you would never have felt unloved and unwanted."

"Madam, had you been there the countryside would have buzzed as an agitated hive and I would have put my sire to open shame."

"I was speaking of when you were younger."

"My virility would have but manifested itself sooner."

"I think we should return to your family. Did your grandfather know of Phillip's illness?"

"Coward." The grin was still upon his lips. "Phillip brought Mother back to England. He came back to die; by that time the disease had spread throughout his body so badly that he was disfigured.

"From what I have gathered it is a fulsome way to die. Mother could bear the guilt no longer and confessed what had happened. There are probably more bastards running around in England than legitimate heirs; I but added to the number, but my Grandfather was unrelenting in the matter. He would not see my sire, nor have anything to do with him. This standoff lasted until Grandfather's death. Once a year Thomas was called into the old man's presence to give an accounting of his stewardship and was then dismissed until the following year. The old Lord could not cast him out since Thomas was legal heir to all he owned. The law of primogeniture abides there, I am sure you know." His voice had once more taken on the cold biting tones he inflected when speaking of his father. "Brigette was very ill at this time and needed constant care, as did Phillip. Grandfather just locked himself up in the tower of Wickhaven Manor and would see no one except Mother and his servants. M'Lord Thomas emerged the victor, at last. Grandfather surrendered his seat in the House of Lords to M'Lord and from that moment on he became in name, if not in fact, Lord Bartlett in all things save one," Jamie chuckled. "Control of the monies. It used to rankle him no end that he had to beg for every tuppence needed to run the estate and for his own use and then to account for its useage." A wry grin crossed his handsome face. His hand found its way to her silken tresses and lingered there.

"Then about this time Phillip died—a horrible death. Amidst all this confusion I came along. There was no longer any doubt in anyone's mind as to my parentage for as I told you I am the likeness to my Lord Thomas Bartlett." Jamie's voice thickened with malice.

"What happened to your parents?" Katy asked hesitatingly.

Jamie's dark eyes flashed. "Mother was so guilt-ridden she locked herself in a convent—to repent of her sin."

"And your father?"

Jamie threw back his head, a growl rumbled in his throat. "My father! God, what a laugh that is, he doesn't know the meaning of guilt. It was then that my *father* was sent to London to fill Grandfather's empty seat in the House of Lords. The old man just seemed to dry up. Nothing was important to him anymore, not even the needs of his people in Wickhavenshire whom he had sworn to represent and protect. I was raised by that forever angered and embittered old man."

"But I thought your mother and father married."

Jamie nodded. "When I was fifteen Brigitte finally died and Thomas enticed Mother to marry him. 'To right the wrong he had done,' as he put it, but in reality it was to secure his inheritance. She has lived a life of hell ever since, for she has become just as jealous of him as Brigitte was. And no wonder, there are five or six of us bastards roaming the English country sides claiming Thomas as our common sire. The only satisfaction I can claim is that when Grandfather passed away five years ago he left me the bulk of his estate; land, title and all, with the stipulation that I care for Mother. The title meant nothing to me and everything to Thomas." A sardonic smile tightened his mouth into an ugly line. "I made him sweat for awhile and fight for what was rightfully his. I never saw a man struggle so hard for something so worthless. It was worth every shilling I lost to watch him squirm." He chuckled at the pleasure the memory gave him.

"My poor Jamie. You must have had a terrible childhood."

"Nay, lass, not poor any longer, but by far the richest man on earth now that I have you." His arms enclosed her and warm lips dined upon the sweetness she offered him. "Have I told you how much I love you?" His soft voice caressed her gently as did his hands.

Her laugh caught in her throat. "Nay, love, not for so long—at least an hour."

He claimed her mouth and she felt his great need for her grow as his mouth moved upon hers. He was as a hungry man longing to be filled and she silently cursed the time lost by both because of their mutual pride and stubbornness.

"How many children shall we have?" he asked lazily.

"Oh, at least a dozen."

"Well, there go my long voyages along the Spanish Main. I can see where most of my work is going to be taking place," he whispered as he lightly brushed the back of his hand against her cheek and hair, his mustache drooping in a gentle smile.

"Jamie!"

"You will get fat having that many of my brats," he teased.

"Will you love me when I am fat?" she whispered.

"I shall love you forever," he pledged.

"Do you think your mother will like me?"

"Of course, how could anyone not love you?"

"Mothers are usually very jealous of their sons, aren't they?"

"I suppose so."

She sensed a subtle uneasiness come between them.

"Well, I had better relieve Mr. Cruse or he will be coming after me." Kissing her on the tip of her nose he rose. While he dressed Katy felt a chill tip-toe across her heart and wondered why she should feel so apprehensive about Jamie's mother. She made up her mind to ask Billy to tell her all about Valentine de Sancè de Languedoc-Bartlett.

That afternoon when Billy brought her tea she asked him about Lady Bartlett. He was very reluctant to say anything about his master's Mother, but finally gave in to her pleadings. Katy told him what little Jamie had revealed about her Ladyship.

"Aye, the poor Lady. 'Tis truly a sad life herself has had

with the Bartletts. Ye remember the Captain told ye she'd locked herself up into a convent?" Katy nodded. "Well, it made her a little—" He touched his temple.

"When she first returned to the family she nearly drove 'em all as daft as she be with all 'er religious preachin's. 'Course I suppose livin' closed up all them years with nothin' but them sisters would drive anyone batty.

"Then she married Jamie's father and he ain't changed 'is ways, neither then nor now—not by a farthin's worth. He still thought when he arrived on the scene all the ladies should start heftin' their petticoats. This just about fixed 'er Ladyship. She gave up 'er fling at religion. Keepin' up with 'is Lordship's shenanigans would keep the Lord Hissself busy.

"Most times she thinks the Capt'n is Lord Thomas. That's the reason he hates fer anyone t' call 'im 'My Lord.' She be very jealous of the Capt'n, whether 'e be Jamie to 'er or 'is father."

"My God! How terrible!"

"Jamie had a special house built fer 'er and she be seldom in the big house, Mistress. She be not a violent woman, jist a sad one."

Still Katy felt very uneasy about her future mother-in-law.

The tropical sun beat down unrelentingly on the black and silver canopy. Even with the slight breeze blowing the sultry day was oppressive. Katy looked upward from the damp pallet on which she reclined. The only thing in motion was the great, dark hawk which rose and fell above her head with the movement of the billowing awning and the top-gallents high above the deck. The hypnotic furling of the awning gave the serpent the appearance of twisting and turning in agony, trying to escape the sharp beak of the bird of prey.

She pulled at the top of her bodice and blew cool breaths of air down the inside of her gown. When that failed to

refresh her, unloosening the top two buttons of the already revealing bodice, she absent-mindedly swished the lace trimmed ivory fan lazily back and forth. The perspiration dribbled between her growing breasts and she dabbed at the moisture idly.

"Would you like some help?" Jamie squatted down at her feet grinning. She blushed and pulled the dress up quickly.

"It is most fortunate for my crew that your sanctuary is out of limits to them, madam. If any but I gazed upon you, I would have him flogged." He was still smiling, but the chill of his voice belied his smile.

"But no one—"

"No, no explanation is necessary, I know my crew obeys me. As your pregnancy progresses you become lovelier, and alas, I become insanely jealous." He knelt forward and kissed her gently. "Soon we will be in Jamaica."

"How soon?" she asked eagerly.

"Are you so anxious to be ashore again?"

"You made two promises, my love, that were to be filled in Jamaica."

He raised his eyebrows. "I did?"

"Have you forgotten so soon?"

He smiled, uncertain as to her meaning.

"The first one," she counted on her finger, "that you would buy me every green dress on the island. And the second," she held up another finger, "that you would make of me an honest woman, though not necessarily in that order."

He smiled again, this time with amusement. "So I did and so I shall."

"How soon will we arrive?"

"If the winds pick up—one week. Otherwise, a few days longer."

"I shall pray we get a gale."

"Capt'n," Mr. Cruse called from the rail, "there's somethin' on the water, sir."

Jamie squeezed her hand and moved to his first officer's side. She could see Mr. Cruse pointing to a tiny dot on the horizon. Jamie glued his eye to the spy glass. Everyone strained to see what the apparition could possibly be. Each man watched intently as the distance shortened between them and the object.

"It's a raft," one of the crew shouted.

"There be two people on it. Look dead to me. Nobody's movin'!" someone else yelled.

"Prepare to bring them aboard," came from the Captain.

As the raft drew closer the crew could see two men half-naked in dirty rags sprawled on board the frail craft. Their faces were blistered and raw from the searing rays of the sun.

The Captain gave a signal and four men jumped into the waters. They brought the raft against the ship and climbed on board the tossing platform, securing the two vessels. A seat sling was lowered and while they fastened the first man into the seat, a muttering of angry obscenities reached Jamie's ears.

"What is the problem down there?"

"These men have been tortured badly, sir."

"Send them up slowly. Careful! Careful, lads," Jamie cautioned as they raised the first of the injured men.

Gentle hands reached out for the limp form and eased him to the deck. The crew moved in.

"Git back, git back," Mr. Cruse growled, pushing the curious mates back.

Katy could hear the men cursing to one another as they were forced away from the body lying silently on the sun bleached deck. Her curiosity now thoroughly aroused, she climbed to her feet and strained to see. She moved closer.

The second man was now being brought aboard. Before they could slip him out of the harness, Katy could see he was but a young man a little older than herself. His mouth and lips were swollen and burnt black, his tongue protruded and

dangled limply, his eyes were swollen shut, the eyelids blistered. As they tenderly lifted him up, she could see he was naked from the waist down and had been castrated.

"Oh, merciful God!" she moaned.

His arm swung forward, and she stared with horror at the dangling, blackened stump of dead flesh and charred bone from whence a pale, living, feeling hand had once pulsed, fondled, fought and then in the prime of youthful buoyancy been severed.

Blackness overcame her.

The other castaway was in like condition. One hand lay shattered and mutilated. His feet had been branded repeatedly with a hot iron. In the middle of his forehead was another mark, a blazing H for heretic. The stench from the human feces and filth they had lain in for days, ripened by the hot tropical sun, made even the strongest stomach heave.

"Lord in heaven!" Mr. Cruse uttered, "are they yet alive?"

Jamie felt a weak flutter from the pulses. "Barely. Get them below and do what you can for them."

The mask that had been missing for so long had slipped into place, the jawbone worked convulsively under the ashen pall. His voice, when he spoke, was thick with disgust. The men had drawn into small groups in muted anger.

"Get them back to work, Mr. Cruse. Keep their minds occupied."

The first mate went among the men bellowing orders and the crew cursed him savagely as they moved to obey.

"Capt'n," Billy cried and motioned for him to hurry.

Jamie knelt, anxiously waiting while Billy felt for Katy's pulse. He nodded. "Seems ter have fainted is all, sir."

Picking Katy up, Jamie carried her below to the cabin. As he lowered her to the bed, she clutched at his shirt front.

His hands smoothed her tousled hair back from her face, noting the brave front she was trying to maintain. "Are you all right, darling?"

Biting her lower lip and closing her eyes, she tried to

control the trembling which had ascended upon her. "Oh, Jamie, those poor, poor men. Who could do such a terrible thing?"

His face was alive with hatred as he uttered a vile oath, "The Spaniards, may their fiendish souls rot in hell. The idol worshipping bastards!" He threw himself away from her and paced angrily. "I would like to kill every whore's son of them."

Memories of his own capture and agony swept over him. Phantom fingers of endless misery stabbed their way upward from the dark recesses of his mind. Forced, forgotten recollections swept over him in a tide of the remembered agonies. A time past where hatred had been the sole support of sanity and manhood. Memories flooded through him as a tidal wave. It seemed as if he could once more hear the cries of anguish and torment and feel the hopelessness and despair of tortured, dying men. With great effort he pushed those horrors back into the dark pit of forgetfulness. The dark monster of his haunted mind fought the rejection, but the iron will prevailed. His head ached from the combat.

"Every Protestant that will not denounce his faith is tortured similarly. Most are fortunate and die." His voice was low and thick with abhorrence.

Remembering her condition, he embraced her, kissing and soothing her. "Katy, don't think of it any longer."

"I can't help it." He could sense the hysteria gnawing at her. "I can still see that wretched man."

"You must forget, I demand that you do. Remember our son."

Holding her closely, he soothed her until she quieted. Then Jamie bathed her and put her to bed as he would have a child.

Later that evening, Billy knocked at the door. Jamie was at the desk recording the days events in his log. "Come."

"How's the lass?"

"She is resting at the moment. I have had a bloody time quieting her down."

"It was a gruesome sight fer 'er tender eyes t' hafta see, sir. The lad with the stump died, sir, even as we thought he would. I think the other one will live, though it's a rough time he'll be havin'. He was conscious fer a short while. The enmity within 'twill be the force t' see 'im through."

"It has been a long time since we have seen sights such as that today, Billy. I had almost forgotten."

"Aye. Best they be forgotten, sir. I only hope the Mistress fergets fer the sake o' the wee one."

"What is the survivor's name and has he told you anything?"

"Aye, a wee bit, sir. His name be Josiah Denton, the other was 'is brother, Robert. They be of the Brotherhood, Capt'n. They were on one of the small islands off Tortuga seein' some of them Indian women and got drunk on the beach. The Dons came upon 'em unsuspected like. They tried their bloody convertin' ways on 'em, startin' with Robert, him bein' the youngest they thought it would be more convincin'. They applied hot pokers t' the both of 'em, then when that dinna turn the trick, the papist dogs made sure Robert wouldna breed no more heretics. He begged the priest fer help, that be when the officer slashed 'is hand off fer touchin' 'im with 'is heretic hands. Josiah somehow broke away and dragged 'is brother t' the fire and stuck the stump in or he woulda bled to death then and there. They tried to convince Josiah to repent and kiss their heathen cross and when he wouldn't they branded 'is forehead, then continued their torturin' by pullin' 'is fingernails out one by one. The Indians heard the commotion and since there were so few of the mother-sons, attacked. While the battle be ragin', somehow or other, Josiah got 'is brother to the raft and they been ridin' the sea ever since." Billy paused, his steel gray eyes blazing. Once his emotions were under control he continued. "We thought we would be buryin' Robert, askin' yer leave and yer presence, sir."

Opening a desk drawer, Jamie took out a well worn bible and followed Billy topside.

The body lay on a plank, sewn into a lead weighted canvas shroud, draped with a Union Jack. The men stood around in groups, restless and uneasy. The undercurrent of anger touched the Captain as he made his way through the men.

"Men," he began, as the murmuring ceased, "we have met at this time to pay homage to a fellow seaman. Even though we did not know him, he was one of our own, even of the Brotherhood. We have fought the common enemy. But now, Robert Denton is dead. We will continue to fight and when we meet the enemy, we will dedicate the battle to this brave lad. Uncover your heads."

He turned the religious part of the ceremony over to Mr. Cruse. The wind carried the first mate's voice hither and yon, yet every man on board felt the message in his heart.

"I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

"The Lord Jesus said that all shall be resurrected and the sea shall also give up her dead. Robert Denton shall patiently await that day and stand before the judgment bar and accuse his murderers of this foul crime which has claimed his body in the spring of his youth and shall be able to declare with honour that even though his body was put through the scourges of hell, he kept his faith. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Please repeat the Lord's Prayer. Our Father—"

While his men finished the prayer Jamie looked them over. If at that moment he had asked them to sail with him to Porto Bello or Panama as Morgan had, they would have voted as one man with a single thought in mind: Kill the Spaniards!

"For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen."

Jamie gave the signal to slip the body over the side. There was a loud splash as the sea received her offering. The four men quietly and grimly folded the flag and stowed it away for future use.

Katy kept to her bed for several days. Everytime she thought about the new passenger she would become ill. But as they neared Jamaica her excitement increased and she thought of nothing else save her marriage to her beloved Jamie. It seemed as if the child within sensed the excitement also, for he refused to be still.

The morning was still young as she lay in Jamie's arms smiling to herself. "And what may I ask is so amusing?" he remarked nuzzling her throat.

"Not amusing, love, it is just that I am so full of joy I tingle all over." She cuddled closer.

"Am I the basis of that joy?" he whispered.

"Oh, yes, for soon you will be mine."

He smiled down at her. "I am already yours."

"But I mean really mine. With words spoken over us—"

"Do those words mean so much?"

"It will mean that I am your wife."

"I have never thought of you as anything but mine."

"Yours yes, but I can remember when you thought of me as less than your wife." She traced her finger across his forehead and down to the tip of his nose, smiling teasingly.

He scowled at the memory, "I was less than a man then, an animal. But always I thought of you as mine."

"Ah, but such a gorgeous animal."

"How did you ever come to love me? I treated and used you so vilely."

"Maybe it is true what you said about it being the secret wish of every woman to be taken."

"To be taken yes, but not to be raped," he told her bitterly.

"You didn't rape me, Jamie," she told him soothingly.

"You can lie to yourself, Katy, but not to me. I know what I did. I know what was in my heart."

"But, Jamie, I love you. I think I loved you from the first moment I saw you and I could see what a magnificent creature you are."

"You had a strange way of showing it, my love. You despised my very touch and that just drove me on."

"One part of me did resent your treatment, but the other part—I had a terrible time fighting the other part." She sighed. "Oh, Jamie, do you really love me?"

"Love you? I feel sometimes that I am being consumed by the fires of my love. I hunger and thirst for just the sight of you when I am away from you. God, how I adore you," he placed his hand on her swelling belly, "and the gift of love you carry beneath your heart. And if it pleases you so much to have words spoken over us and a piece of paper telling you that I love you and belong to you, I can hardly wait to fulfill my promise." He kissed her passionately, leaving her weak and trembling.

"Land ho," came from the crow's nest.

Jamie came up onto his elbow, then grinned at her. "Get up, you little minx. Time to prepare for your wedding day. Would you take your vows of love and obedience to your lord and master abed?" He slapped her bare rump and, jumping up, dressed hurriedly.

Chapter 9

Katy stood at his side with Jamie's arm around her waist. The men hung from the rat lines and over the gunwales. Anxiousness and anticipation marked every face, for each had his own private reason for reaching shore.

Through a light haze the Blue Mountains, which enclosed the bay, loomed loftily, majestically. The helmsman steered the brigantine into position to enter the narrow channel which protected Port Royal from immediate access. On the two points guarding the entrance to the deep sandy bay Katy could see large cannon gleaming.

"Point Mayfield to port and Pelican to starboard," Jamie said pointing out the two gleaming sentinels. "No vessel can make it in or out of this stronghold in one piece without Morgan's say so. Sir Henry has put all his knowledge to work here. It looks as if Port Royal is finally coming of age."

Jamie pointed out the different ships he recognised at anchor. He could see many new crude buildings since his trip last year, with more under construction.

He glanced up at the mast and noted with satisfaction both the Union Jack and his own silver and black banner fluttering in the light breeze and knew that when the ensign and Hawk were reported to Morgan a meeting would be eminent.

Puzzled, Katy looked up at him. "Henry Morgan? I thought he was a pirate."

"True, my sweet, he was a pirate, as was I. King Charles made an honest man of him five or six years ago, by knighting him. Now he is the Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica. We will go ashore and meet him. He would never forgive me if he thought I had brought a beautiful woman on his island without allowing him the sight of her."

"Do you know him?"

"I have sailed with Henry Morgan since I was nineteen and we sacked Panama together. Of course I was but a callow youth then, that knew everything there was to be known. I had my first command under the Admiral of the Brotherhood when I was twenty; until then my orders were signed by the governor of Tortuga. When Henry became governor, I turned privateer with letter-of-marque from him. Yes, I know Sir Henry very well. He would have my hide if I did not take you to meet him."

The beauty of the harbour was breath-taking. Lush jungle growth grew to the edge of the capital. The brilliant flowers were in wild profusion everywhere, sending forth their sweet, intoxicating fragrances on the breezes that soothed the enchanting paradise. Katy's soul drank in the sights and sounds of land. Eagerly her eyes swept the scenes in front of her. The beauty of the tropical Elysium drugged her senses with its overwhelming luxury. The Blue Mountains appeared on the horizon, rising and touching the sky, then plunging into the ocean. The day was warm and the breeze gentle.

As they neared the shore the people crowded as near to the edge of the dock as they dared and yelled obscenities and invitations to the crew.

Jamie led Katy away and took her below to save her the

embarrassment of the shouted greetings. He gathered the cargo manifests explaining as he went that he had some business to attend to. As soon as he got it out of the way he would return to her.

The hours lengthened and Katy tried to find something to do to keep busy. Sewing was a bore; reading a waste of time as her mind could not contain the information perused. She sat on the gallery seat surveying the ships at anchor, noting the different flags flapping idly in the lazy breeze. Her attention was suddenly jerked back to the present.

"Come."

"Mum, there's a courier from the governor ter see the Capt'n."

"Show him in, Billy."

The messenger proved to be a tall, gangling youth near her own age, who, when brought before Katy, was so entranced with her beauty he became tongue-tied until Billy nudged him none too gently. Then with a great amount of stammering and stuttering, the message was finally delivered.

Captain Bartlett and his lady would honour the governor by their presence at dinner at seven o'clock.

Smiling, she assured him they would attend. Billy gave him another nudge and practically dragged him out of the cabin. Katy nearly collapsed in a fit of laughter.

As the afternoon wore on and Jamie did not return, Katy began to fret. She had never eaten with gentry before and she was nearly beside herself when Jamie finally did arrive.

"Where have you been?" she cried. "I thought you would never get here. The governor has invited us to dine with him and I just don't think that I can go."

"Wait, wait," he laughed, "you are talking so fast it is running together. Did I understand you to say Sir Henry wants us to dine with him?"

She kept nodding her head until he placed his hand on each side and held her, kissing her forehead. "What are you so frightened of?"

"Jamie, I have never eaten at a great table, only in the

kitchen with the servants," she wailed.

"Katy, you have eaten with me and you have beautiful manners, you were taught quite well in all things at Lord Carstairs'. You must remember underneath all that foppery and title Sir Henry is still a pirate at heart and all who attend are of the same Brotherhood. You will grace his table with poise and beauty. Dry your tears now for I have a surprise."

He stuck his head out of the door and spoke a few words. When he re-entered several negroes followed carrying package after package, soon the bedroom was filled with parcels.

Jamie sat down on the gallery seat and watched Katy with amusement as she ripped and tore the bundles apart. Squealing with delight, Katy soon discovered each package contained a green dress, with undergarments, hats and shoes to go with each precious gown. She oohed and aahed and ran to him, throwing warm, loving arms around his neck declaring her undying love a dozen times, until she collapsed in exhaustion and happiness.

"Which one are you wearing tonight?"

"Oh, Jamie, they are all so lovely." She stood up and held one against her. The gown was of dark green satin, with a plunging V shaped neckline, and wide puffy sleeves. The skirt would fit close across the front, billowing out at the sides and back. An underlay of delicate lace fit into the inset in the front. She slipped out of her dress and quickly pulled the gown over her head and tried to button it.

Crying out in dismay, she turned to him, "Jamie, I'm too fat, it won't meet."

"My love, you are not fat, you are pregnant. Try on another one. You will be able to wear that one later on." He assured her gently.

With help from the willing suitor, Katy chose another gown which pleased her. The wide gathered skirt hid the fact that she was with child from all save the knowing eye.

As they neared the governor's mansion, Katy's nervous-

ness increased and she held on to Jamie's arm tighter. He looked down at her and smiled, patting her hand for reassurance.

Never had he seemed so handsome to her. He wore his dark hair loose and flowing. He would wear a wig for no man, he had declared heatedly when Billy brought the white-powdered peruke to him. The doublet was the black and silver of his own house, fashioned in a diamond pattern, with black breeches and black thigh-high leather boots. A black mantle trimmed in fur was thrown over his left shoulder.

Jamie's eyes fondled Katy. It seemed to him that she grew more beautiful every day. She wore her hair braided and wrapped around her head beneath an ivory and diamond-studded comb. Draped from under the comb, a lace mantilla as delicate as a baby's breath fell across her shoulders and down her back. The full-skirted Lincoln green satin gown was accented by her sparkling emerald eyes and the milk-white complexion of her bared shoulders and bosom. A delicate silver chain with a single emerald shaped diamond hung between her breasts. Matching ear ornaments of smaller stones danced as she turned her head. She shivered and he pulled her shawl up over her shoulders.

"Cold?"

"No, frightened."

"Katy, you have nothing to fear. In the first place no one would dare affront you in my presence and secondly you will end up casting a charm over them all. Now, relax and enjoy yourself. You are probably the first breath of beauty to come into this house since Mary Elizabeth arrived." He smiled at her questioning look. "She's Sir Henry's wife."

Suddenly they were there. The introductions were being made and Katy knew her fears had been groundless. Mary Elizabeth made her feel welcome and at home.

Katy watched Jamie and Sir Henry together, he being tall and wide of shoulder, slender of waist and hips. Katy knew by heart the power and firmness of his muscular body.

Sir Henry, on the other hand, was not much taller than herself, with dark brown eyes and a thick column of neck. His chest was broad and he was now becoming stout. The knighted corsair wore a heavy wig that lay in long curls upon his shoulders. Droplets of sweat crept from beneath the weighty peruke and ran down the side of his face, dropping leisurely upon his bright gold and green doublet. The brightly colored garb emphasised his growing bulk. His legs showed none of the extra weight and the green hose and breeches accented the muscular calves and thighs.

Katy found Mary a handsome woman. About forty, she was still slim and graceful with just a trace of silver in her softly arranged brown hair; her eyes were blue and friendly, her gown of yellow lawn was simply patterned. Katy's hand was grasped warmly.

"My dear, where did Jamie ever find you? You are such a dainty, exquisite beauty. Just what he needs. He is so devilishly handsome himself. All of us on the island are secretly in love with him."

They turned and watched the host and his guest talking to the gathered captains. No one referred to them as buccaneers or pirates any more, as that was a thing in their past, but no one doubted that in their hearts there was no change.

Jamie's and Sir Henry's old friends, Worthington and Franks, were thrashing out enjoyable memories of the old days, as were Captains Johnson, Bardagne and several others whose names she had missed. They kept glancing at her furtively and she felt herself flushing as she guessed their thoughts, for no doubt they had heard all sorts of gossip on the docks. Jamie added his glance to theirs and grinned at her.

"My dear, I can see you and Captain Bartlett are so very much in love. I envy you. Harry and I have always wanted children, but have never been so blessed. How long have you and Jamie been married? It must have been since his trip to England, for he was a carefree bachelor when he visited us last year."

"Does it really show so soon?" Blushingly, Katy cast her eyes downward seeking the betraying sign of her folly.

"No, not really. The panniers and cut of the skirt help to hide your condition. I suppose it shows more to a woman than anyone, especially an envious one."

"Wis ye this, Lizzie? Jamie has asked me to unite this lovely lady to him in holy wedlock. Can y' imagine this wary rake married? 'Tis enough t' make ye lose faith in these young pups." Sir Henry eyed Katy from stem to stern, his laughing brown eyes resting on her crimson face. "But by all that's holy, I can see why he wants to grab her up fast."

Mary Elizabeth looked at the two young lovers bemused. "Why, I thought..." Her eyes also rested upon the rosy cheeks. "Why, that's wonderful, Harry. We will arrange the biggest celebration Jamaica has ever seen for the new bride and groom."

"There, I told ye so, Jamie. You can forget about leaving by the end of the week. I don't know why ye want ter go t' Virginia anyhow. I need ye here. The Dons have been gettin' bolder all the while."

"Yes, I know. I have a sample of their boldness on board the Hawk now." Jamie proceeded to tell Sir Henry of the plight of Josiah Denton and his late brother.

Mary Elizabeth led Katy to one side. "My dear, I had no idea," she told her gently.

"Oh, please, m'lady, don't think ill of me. I love him so much and it—it just happened."

"Of course, dear, don't be upset. It is no wonder you fell in love with him, as I said, we all have." She patted Katy's arm. "Please, call me Lizzie, all my friends do."

To Katy's relief, it was announced that dinner was being served.

Jamie crossed the room to her and presented his arm, grinning at her mischievously. "What think you of our fearsome pirate admiral now, my sweet?" he whispered.

"I think the scourge of the Spanish Main has been tamed by the soft hand of a woman," she teased.

A frown flitted across his brow as he considered her remark. "Let not that idea dwell within your lovely head, m'lady," he warned her with a slight edge in his voice.

Jamie watched the governor and his wife as they led the way down the brightly lit hallway to the dining hall. Morgan's head was tilted toward his wife's smiling face. He threw back his massive wigged head and laughed loudly, then murmured a reply to the gentle woman, giving her arm an intimate squeeze as he did so. Jamie recognized the look Lizzie gave her husband, for he had seen it many times of late in Katy's glowing eyes.

He regarded the silent damsel beside him and an unexplainable tenderness swept over him. He covered the small hand lying lightly upon his arm with his hand. She raised loving eyes to his and met his softening gaze.

"It does not seem to have harmed the old catamount and he does appear to enjoy it," Jamie mused. Shaking himself mentally, he tried to throw off the strange mood which enveloped him.

As they entered the ornate room, the beauty of the richly endowed hall with its highly polished oak panelling and gleaming floor began to fade as a strong sense of evil settled around Katy like a sinister cloud. She tried to concentrate on the breath-taking elegance surrounding her. With deliberate attention she observed the room closely. The crystal chandelier hanging over the long linen covered table glowed with a multitude of pallid beeswax tapers. The multi-coloured prisms reflected across the snow-white table upon the thin, rose-sprigged china and golden tableware and cut crystal. Scintillating flashes danced across the highly polished floor as a light breeze gently touched the delicate tear-drops that dangled from the suspended fountain of light. The lights shyly retreated before the tender breath, and a slave moved quickly to the open doors, drawing them closed for the moment, while another orange and green liveried servant raised a long lighted wick to the tallows giving them life again.

Katy slipped into the chair Jamie held for her, smiling up at him fetchingly. His hands caressed her bare shoulders possessively before moving to take his place at Sir Henry's right hand. The skin where his hands had lingered continued to nurture the warmth he had left behind. Then once more that same uneasy feeling grazed her. Katy shuddered at the keenness which seemed to pierce her with needle-like sensations. A cold, intense lump settled between her breasts and lodged there.

From beneath lowered lashes she scrutinized the reformed brigands dressed as gentlemen who sat across from her. In the back of her mind she was aware that Sir Henry was retelling some former pirate story. All eyes were turned upon their host and indecorous laughter emitted from their amused lips—all eyes except two. Those stared at her in a penetrating way. Lustful eyes, voracious eyes.

The small, black orbs watched her from a gaunt, cruel face. A white, crooked scar travelled across his long, thin nose and down the narrow jaw, ending beneath his right ear.

Katy dropped her gaze quickly and felt a flush rise from the deep plunge of her décolletage. Her blood felt repelled by the piercing rodent-like glare. She sensed the lecherous brigand mentally stripping the garments from her and she shivered from the evil perusal, feeling sullied and defiled under the lustful stare.

Jamie's laughter joined with the rest of the guests, and Katy was unable to attract his attention. She picked at her food nervously, eating but little of the delectable cuisine. The only thing of which she was acutely aware was the tall, gaunt man near the end of the table with the black consuming eyes and ghastly scar.

When she raised her fearful gaze once again his forceful stare struck her as a physical blow and she dropped the heavy golden fork against the petal thin china plate. To her dismay the crack seemed to move very slowly across the dish towards her, slicing one of the red rose buds from the green stem and cutting through another one. With a cry of alarm

she stumbled to her feet. Her flailing hand struck against the wine glass. Time seemed to glide slowly, silently. Horrified, Katy saw all eyes turn upon her. Each gaping mouth formed a silent gasp as if adding its mute condemnation to her clumsiness and unworthiness. Her eyes sought the rosy-hue growing larger as it crept across the white cloth towards her. Large droplets splashed against the dove-white mounds swelling above her bodice with a red, sticky wetness. The fermented odour rose in her nose. The large, emerald pools in the stark, white face misted as she felt the startled looks cast upon her. To Katy's distressed mind, confusion reigned as king. Suddenly Lizzie was at her side consoling the embarrassed young woman, while Jamie daubed at her soiled gown and whispered soothingly to her.

Katy looked to the end of the table. Bernis de Bardagne's small, dark, piercing glower was still upon her and she recognized the burning, salacious leer as it continued to devour her; a jeering smile twisted the cruel mouth at her discomfort. She swayed momentarily.

"Please, Jamie. Please, take me back to the Hawk."

Lizzie's soothing voice echoed in her head. "She needs to lie down and rest, Jamie. I think the excitement is too much for her in her condition. But there is no need to go back to the Hawk, as you well know, we have plenty of room here."

Katy felt strong arms close around her, and Jamie held her against his hardened chest. He followed one of the slaves across the room. As they passed through the portal, Katy felt compelled to look back over Jamie's shoulder and found those same evil eyes still upon her. Jamie felt a shudder run through Katy's body as she pressed her face into his chest with an inaudible cry.

Later he paced the large room in agitation. "For heaven's sake, Katy, there has to be a reason for that—" he waved his hand impatiently, "childish display you performed tonight."

He stopped at the foot of the massive bed and eyed the now quiescent girl. She seemed dwarfed by the wide expanse of the linen covered feather tick. Katy kept her tear-stained

eyes glued to the filmy netting clinging to the canopy which stretched across the top of the bed from the four tall posters. She knew he was waiting with hands on hips for her explanation, but she was afraid to offer the reason for her inexcusable behaviour.

"Well!" he demanded.

She closed her eyes tightly and shook her head. Jamie moved to the bedside. Irritation still pricked at him. Hands closed around her arms, the strong, hard fingers biting sharply.

"Katy," he shook her, "tell me now."

The loosened, silky bronze mass tumbled across his hands and arms and her eyes glistened with a renewed mistiness as they darted open at his intensity and force.

"Jamie, hold me, please. Just hold me."

The urgent need in her voice struck him forcibly and he hesitated but a moment before enfolding her in his arms. He let her cry until the tears ceased and she lay quietly against him.

Brushing her hair back from the tear-drenched face, he said softly, "Now, my sweet, you will tell me."

She shuddered. "That horrible, terrible man..."

"Which horrible man, Katy?" He struggled to keep the impatience from his voice.

"The one—the one with that frightful scar."

He felt her body quiver again and tightened his hold on her as his mind sifted through the maze of faces that had surrounded Sir Henry's table that night.

"De Bardagne?"

She nodded against his chest.

"That bastard insulted you?" The demand cut the air like a well tempered blade. "In what way? As I recall the evening, he wasn't even near you?"

"Oh, Jamie, the way he looked at me—And that—that ghastly scar. It was terrible—horrible—Everytime he looked at me I felt—I felt as if he had touched me."

Jamie laughed and kissed her quickly on the nose. "My

dear Katy, all of those horrible men were looking at you tonight and probably with the same lusty fervor with which Bardagne eyed you. If I remember correctly I used to do the same thing myself—and still do, as a matter of fact. But, my sweet, I can not go out and challenge them all because they looked or ogled or leered at you, can I?" A grim smile twisted his lips and his voice chilled, "But if they touch you or insult you in any way, then, my dear wife-to-be, *that* will be another matter."

He arose and moved around the room extinguishing the candles. "Stay away from Bardagne. If he thought that he could get away with it he probably would try to hurt you."

"Why?"

"Revenge. It is a private feud we have had going on for several years. He would like to see it revived again, I think."

All the lights had been darkened except the one beside the bed and the large room lay in deep shadows. Jamie opened the verandah doors widely to invite the cooling breeze into the warm room. From the bed Katy could see the full face of the golden moon.

She watched Jamie as he pulled the black and silver doublet over his head. The muscles across his chest rippled as he removed the garment and folded it, laying it across the back of a nearby chair. He stood with his hands on his hips, frowning and contemplating his feet, then looked at Katy with bemusement.

She tilted her head. "What's the matter?"

"I believe I have a problem."

"Oh?"

"My boots."

She arched her brow.

"Well, as you know, Billy usually removes these high ones for me."

"And—"

"Well, either I receive a little help from you or—"

"Or what?" She could hardly contain her laughter.

"Or we both are going to have a very uncomfortable night, my love."

"Both of us?" Her lips parted in an arch smile.

"Would you rather have cold feet against your backside, my sweet, or hard, scratchy leather? I do not wear these thigh-high leather encasements for comfort, madam, merely for fashion. And the longer I wear them tonight the more I am convinced that whoever designed them was either a eunuch or an old man long used to sleeping alone and received great joy from the mere fact that he has invented a chastity belt for the male population."

Katy giggled. "How so, my love?"

"If you females ever gave it thought, you may have wondered why those of us who cling so tenaciously to the tedious foppery of fashion never sit for any length of time in these damnable torture chambers." He slipped his fingers around the high lip of the boot and followed the contour toward the inside of his thigh. "I have been in fearful apprehension all evening that my amorous nights were going to be forcefully and permanently cut off, and all that just prior to my wedding night. I usually order my boots in the soft Cordovan leather and the high ones are cut so that they can be cuffed over and relieve me of this anxiety, but I believe that these must be a pair from the Spanish and the Dons are gleefully repaying me for my abuse of them."

Katy listened to him silently with a coquettish smile.

"For the life of me, madam, I can find nothing in my conversation so amusing."

"I thought you were going to explain the chastity belt," she smiled teasingly.

His brow darkened at her mirth in mock anger. "With these boots still on and galling me like an excoriating tormentor, I can't get my damned breeches down," he growled through clenched teeth.

Katy sat up in the middle of the bed, pulling her legs beneath her. Putting both hands across her mouth to contain

the enjoyment which nearly bubbled over from inside her at his discomfort, she rocked back and forth in total mirth. Her eyes danced as she tried to contain her glee.

Jamie glared at her, piqued by her laughter, then slowly the absurdity of the situation struck him and he threw back his head and his laughter echoed Katy's.

When calm returned Jamie sat himself down on the chair and held out his right leg.

"But I am unclothed," she protested.

"I promise the boot I plant upon your bare bottom will be as tender as my hand."

"That promise gives me no comfort, my love, for only a few moments ago your hand would have rivaled a thunderbolt's salvo."

Inclining his head, he offered his leg again.

She climbed slowly out of bed and came toward him. The soft candle-light reflected the fiery high lights of the hip-long mane; a glimpse of creamy, soft flesh peeked through the thick mass here and there hinting of the promise beneath. She stopped and waited for instructions.

He fought the impulse to allow his eyes to wander to paths of beauty elsewhere besides her lovely face and his hands felt the desire to touch her and—Forcefully he brought his attention to the problem at hand. "First things first," he thought.

"—Well, you straddle my leg—no, no, face my boot and when I push, you pull."

He swallowed at the knot that had somehow found its way into his throat and took lodging there as she swung one long, slender leg across his boot and bent over. Her hair fell away from the softly rounded bottom and he sat confronted by the inviting derrière. With concentrated effort he directed his gaze upward and met her amused eyes as she turned slightly toward him.

"Now what, my love?"

"—Well . . . yes. That is—I put my foot so," he placed his left foot against her bottom. Disconcerted by the delightful

view, he gulped deeply, then noticed Katy watching him with amusement. "And—ah—when I push, you pull at the heel of the boot."

He pushed suddenly and she let go of the boot with a small shriek and fell sprawlingly across the floor. Jamie was immediately at her side.

"Darling, are you hurt?"

She laughed. "No, no. I was just surprised. Let's try it again."

He ran his hand across her buttock where the print of the boot was still visible. "You are hurt."

"No, really I'm not," she assured him, "come on or we'll never get you released from your chastity belt," she said giggling.

She straddled his leg again and took a tighter hold upon the boot. This time the tormentor was released enough that Jamie could pull it off. Then the left one joined its mate and Jamie pinched the wick on the remaining candle and joined his mate also.

The man in the moon was the lone observer as the two lovers declared their passion in the age old ritual of profound sacred and tender love. His smile grew wider, and he sent out his silvery beams to embrace the lovers in his gleaming mantle.

The next day was a full one for Katy. She found herself standing in the middle of a large sitting room on a wooden box with a clucking, fussing, matronly woman and surrounded by bolts of material of all kinds and colours. Jamie and Lizzie insisted upon a bridal trousseau. To the side, Lizzie had informed Madam Corday to make the gowns full to include the growth of the baby.

Sir Henry and Lizzie had been appalled at Jamie's disclosure of Katy's experience on the preceding night. Sir Henry had been very vocal as to what he would do to chastise the blackguard. Under his wife's gentle persuasion the Governor finally calmed down. Jamie was quick to inform His Excellency that the insult was his own and he would

handle it in his own way and time. It was Lizzie who had come up with the brilliant strategy of the wedding gown and a bridal trousseau.

All morning and afternoon the seamstress measured and pinned and clicked her tongue against her teeth until Katy thought she would scream. After several hours Katy decided it was about time to faint; otherwise she would probably never get the chance to sit down and rest, as the lady appeared to be engrossed in her task. Putting her hand to her forehead, Katy uttered a low moan and swayed. Madam Corday grabbed her on one side and Lizzie on the other.

"Mistress Coswell, air ye all right?"

"Just a little faint is all. Could I please sit down and have something to drink?"

They helped her to a lounge and the seamstress rushed to get her a glass of chilled wine. Lizzie put the cup to the pale lips.

"Forgive me, my little dove. I had forgotten yer condition and the time passed so quickly."

Katy coloured at the woman's directness. "No need ter blush, little one. In the middle o' the ocean and so far away from the Church, who can blame ye? And with such a one as the handsome Captain Bartlett—ah, ter be young again."

Picking up the gleaming pale yellow satin Katy had chosen for her gown, she ran a rough, work-worn hand tenderly across it, then laid the delicate lace piece atop the satin. "Fer the beautiful young bride and the handsome groom I will be creatin' the loveliest gown ye ever seen." Her eyes gleamed as if she could already see the promised creation.

"Perhaps you should come back tomorrow, Madam Corday, and we should let Katy rest. After all this is only her second day on firm ground and it has been an exhausting one," Lizzie suggested.

"Aye, perhaps ye be right. Let me be cleanin' up me mess here first. Then I'll be ahurryin' home and be startin' on the gowns. I be as excited about them as if they be me very own."

Katy could hear the two women in the background conversing softly, then she dozed, finally fading into a deep sleep.

She lay in a half-sleep, sensing rather than hearing someone in the room with her. A soft, cooling breeze breathed upon her, awakening her to the fact that the room which had been close and warm, was now open to the evening chill from the balcony.

Lips brushed her own. "Jamie," she murmured sleepily, putting her arms around his neck. Suddenly the kiss became brutal and demanding. Rough, searching hands jerked at her dress front. Katy's eyes flew open in fright, for she knew this was not Jamie.

She struggled and beat at the fiend who held her prisoner with his ravening lips and unrelenting hands. He pressed her down with his body. The full skirt wrapped tightly around her legs hampered her resistance, while his steely fingers held her hands captive. She whimpered in fearful distress. Her eyes were wide with terror, for what she could see of the man was frightening, a return of the nightmare of the previous night. A great, white slash cut across his face, under the left eye and across his nose to his right ear; small ferret-like eyes glowered at her. Harsh, rasping gasps spewed from his mouth with the warm putrid odour of liquor and rotting teeth. The rough stubble of his beard rasped her face and throat as she strained to turn from him. There was no longer any doubt in her tormented mind of the identity of the offender. She wrenched her mouth from his.

"Bardagne!"

Katy opened her mouth to scream. Immediately his mouth covered hers. Her lips were pushed back and her teeth forced open as his tongue pried its way inside, probing, plundering. Without thinking, Katy bit down on the offensive invader. Blood spurted within and she gagged. His hand shot forward and her head rang from the cruel blow.

"Y' little bitch!" he growled in English tinged with a slight

Gallic accent. Covering her bruised lips with his rough hand, he snarled, "You scream, ma cherie, and I will kill you. Now lie quietly and you will not be hurt."

She ceased her struggling and lay trembling violently. His hands traveled over her body and in murmurous tones softly voiced French phrases in her ear. The chaffing stubble raked her face, lips and throat.

"Do not be afraid, ma petite, Bardagne will be very tender with you."

"No, please, don't. Please, go away," she pled.

"Ah, but I can not. Ever since I saw you last night, I have thought of no one but you. Never have I seen such a beauty." He loosened her hair and ran his fingers through it. "You are like a goddess come to life. Bartlett has had you to himself for nearly four months. In the Brotherhood it is share and share alike. I mean to collect my portion." He whispered hoarsely.

"Jamie will kill you," Katy hissed.

He ignored her threat. "Now let us view the merchandise." She felt his hand at her breast and heard the material tear as he slowly and methodically shredded the top of her gown as if he were opening a gift. "Mon Dieu!" he whispered, "no wonder the English dog desires you only for himself."

Pushing his hands away Katy slapped his face as hard as she could, sobbing in her struggle.

"Ah, my little tiger, you only make it more promising."

He stood and loosed the leather baldric, slipping the belt over his head. Katy heard the weapon drop onto the carpet. Eagerness and lust was written across his demonic face. She could now tell that he was shorter than Jamie by three or four inches and thin to the suggestion of gauntness; nevertheless the dim light exposed a powerful chest.

When his hand moved to the front of the cut-off pantaloons to untie them she rolled toward the side of the lounge. He made a lunge for her, a cruel growl gurgled deep in his throat as his hand found her hair, cruelly jerking her back beside him. She shrank in fear as anger sharpened his

features. Held close to him, she could feel the hard muscles of his chest crushing against her bared breasts.

"I grow weary of the struggle, Mademoiselle, you will desist and yield to me."

Suddenly from behind, a heavy hand descended upon his shoulder, accompanied by a loud bestial growl. He was jerked to his feet, a great balled fist connected with his chin and he went sprawling through the air.

Katy was transfixed at the sight; Jamie was crouched, the fearsome dark scowl across his face, teeth bared like a wolf's, dark eyes glinting with feral madness and hideous sounds issuing from his throat. She shrank back in fear of this terrifying stranger before her. The candle-light glittered on the blade in his hand.

Bardagne struck the floor on his shoulder and with ease rolled with the propulsion of the blow, landing upon his feet with the grace of an acrobat. Turning quickly, he faced his adversary. Furtively, he eyed the distance between himself and his sword.

"Ah, the wolf cur has returned to protect his bitch."

A sardonic smile crossed his scarred face accenting the inward malignancy. He moved slowly, edging his way toward the sword.

"Good, we can finally end this stalemate of ours. It has gone on too long as it is." The evil smile widened in anticipation.

The Frenchman's hand slid down his right leg toward his boot. Jamie thrust at him with his sword. Bardagne jumped sideways, grinning wickedly. Suddenly his hand darted to his boot. When it slashed upward, the light reflected off the long blade of a knife.

"Tonight our long relationship will come to an end. Morgan will have to find himself another to lick his boots."

Bardagne held the knife in front of him and it gleamed evilly with a pale glow. It held Katy's horrified stare with a hypnotic force. The distance between the two enemies tightened. Bartlett's features seemed to sharpen as the grey

shadows crept across his face. His sword drew a small circle in the oppressive air, then suddenly the metal shaft streaked forward and Bardagne felt a burning across the back of his hand. He quickly looked down, blood was seeping from the shallow cut. His small, black eyes, between slitted lids, darted from Jamie to the sword lying nearby. Of a sudden his hand shot backward, then just as quickly, forward. Jamie jumped sideways and dropped to one knee, the knife barely missing him. It shattered against the wall, falling harmlessly to the floor.

As the knife left Bardagne's hand he threw himself forward and landed next to the rapier. Grabbing it, he rolled a half turn and came to his feet.

"For years Morgan has sickened me to death with his bragging about you and how you saved his life in Panama. I have wished many times that that arrow had killed you; now I am glad that it did not, for it would have denied me the pleasure I am going to have tonight of killing you myself." His teeth gleamed in the candlelight.

"Are you going to use that sword or talk me to death?" Jamie spat.

"Allez!" the Frenchman yelled springing forward. The razor-sharp tip of the Toledo-forged sword gleamed as it danced upward. The blades crashed together, singing as they met. The swordsmen cautiously felt out each other's strength and weakness.

The Frenchman was light and agile on his feet. He advanced and retreated in graceful leaps, engaging and disengaging, all the while smiling his evil smirk.

"Morgan has always bragged about your bravery, your loyalty; Jamie this and Jamie that. Tonight we will see just what kind of man you are. Personally, I think you are part rabbit."

Common sense told Jamie his temper was his worst enemy and even as he fought Bernis de Bardagne he knew he first had to conquer himself. He bore in strong and hard, repelling each thrust as he advanced. Bartlett knew Captain

Bardagne's swordsmanship was without comparison. It had often been tested and his greatest delight was seeing his opponent's confidence crumble before his artistry. He seemed to receive a sensual pleasure in observing an adversary's growing consciousness of impending defeat. He would toy with the opponent, watching his terror build, before he gleefully despatched him to the nether world. Somehow these tactics didn't seem to be working on the young captain.

The men were now bathed in sweat and panting from the effort. Bardagne was tiring quickly. His days of leisure spent drinking and whoring were now taking their toll.

Jamie knew if he was to win the battle, he must keep pressing and not relent for an instant. Even though he had been taught by a master, he was no match for his antagonist in sheer swordsmanship.

At that moment he felt a slash across his chest. He glanced down quickly and saw blood staining his shirt front. From behind he heard Katy cry out in alarm. Bernis de Bardagne stepped back and laughed sardonically.

"Cheer up, ma cherie, soon you will have a man to take care of your wants and needs," he told her confidently.

"A *man* has already taken care of her wants and needs, she has not need of a braying jackass," Jamie replied scornfully.

"So, the rumors are true, the bitch is to whelp another Bartlett bastard."

"Your tongue is like a woman's, Bernis, it wags endlessly and says nothing. If your sword did half its work we would be through with this charade," Jamie derided.

Bardagne snarled an oath and the room rang with the sound of steel upon steel.

"You arrogant whelp, breathe deeply and often for the time to meet you! Maker is upon you!"

The furniture had been moved against the walls that morning for the ladies and their sewing, thus the middle of the room was spacious and uncluttered, allowing the combatants room to engage in their deadly vendetta.

Jamie met the Frenchman's attack, refusing to give ground. He parried and thrust, advancing step by step; then with an impinging attack Jamie thrust at the octave line and Bardagne parried by dropping his point in a half arc across the enemy's blade. Bartlett countered the deadly tip against the bell, falling back slowly exchanging a series of parries and thrusts. A fast lunge and riposte took the bold pirate by surprise and he quickly returned with a weak riposte of his own. To Katy's bewildered eyes the battle see-sawed back and forth endlessly.

The large room echoed with the sounds of panting, grunts and the ring of metal. Katy watched the terrifying struggle of life and death as she tried to gather her shattered nerves together. The two men fought as if possessed. Frantically searching the room, Katy's eyes fell upon the trio standing in the doorway.

From the opening, Billy and Sir Henry and his wife observed the belligerent contenders in silence with only a gasp of relief or shock escaping from Lizzie breaking the awesome stillness.

Bardagne realised by now that he had underestimated Bartlett, but he lost none of his confidence, for hadn't he sent better swordsmen to their deaths?

The Frenchman advanced, but the Englishman held his ground and the swords sang together once more. Bardagne lunged as if to take his opponent in the shoulder, but again Jamie parried the feint, knocking the blade aside. By this time they were nearly eye to eye. Jamie thrust at Bernis and leaped back, but not quite swiftly enough, for Bernis' sword reached for the sixte line at his breast and he parried the feint with a vicious blow. Bardagne watched the pressure of the steely hand relax against the grip and in turn relaxed his own wrist slightly, dropping his point a fraction and with a U motion passing the blade beneath Bartlett's hand. Coming up on the unprotected side the blade streaked upward. Jamie barely caught the foil in a weak parry, sweeping the deadly tip higher. As they disengaged, Jamie felt a searing pain

across his right cheek. Blood dripped down his jaw and onto his already crimson-dyed shirt. A hard, confident laugh burst from Bardagne's scornful lips. He felt his position secured.

Katy's breath was now coming in short, sharp gasps and the nerves around her mouth and in her hand were tightening and tingling. The pulse in her throat fluttered wildly. A light mist seemed to swirl in front of her eyes. She shrank against the lounge, letting it support her weakened legs.

Bardagne was breathing hard and his face was flushed crimson. Sweat dribbled down his sidelocks and eyebrows. The salty liquid stung his eyes and he swept his left hand quickly across his blurred vision. Suddenly Bartlett charged, raining blow after blow upon the spent man. Bardagne could do no more than avert the vicious thrusts and give ground; Jamie's sword seemed to be everywhere and Bernis was hard put upon to fend off the attack. He slowly became aware of the fact that, though in the past he had humiliated and worn down his antagonists until they had begged for mercy, even now the tables were turned and it was he who was being brought to the inevitable end. His soul was slowly being paralysed by the fact that within the next few minutes his prophecy would be fulfilled, only this time it would be he himself who would be breathing his last breath and meeting his Maker. Despair and defeat registered on his flushed and perspiring face.

Jamie had no intention of letting his enemy surrender. He wanted him dead! He increased his momentum. Bernis retreated. Jamie thrust with a wide feint and Bardagne grinned wickedly; thinking he saw an opening, he lunged. Bartlett sidestepped and as he did so thrust again. The Englishman felt the tip of his sword pierce the skin, pause and then slide into the left chest cavity, grating and grinding as it cut through bone and gristle. He yanked at his blade and as the rapier disengaged blood spurted over the Frenchman's naked chest.

Incomprehension swept Bardagne's face as he stared at

the crimson flow. He looked at Jamie with the same confused eyes, then his legs collapsed and he fell in a heap at Bartlett's feet. The young captain watched the life ooze out of his enemy without emotion. The only sounds in the room were the death gasps of the fallen pirate and the heavy breathing of the victor. Only when the gasps ceased did Jamie turn his attention to Katy; she lay unconscious on the floor. He picked up Bardagne's shirt to cover her as Morgan rushed to his side. The lust of the kill still upon him, his face and chest bathed in scarlet and the fierce scowl darkening his face only enhanced the demonic look about the victor. Unconsciously he tried to shake off Sir Henry's hand, making a deep growl of impatience in his throat. Finally Morgan was able to loosen the tight grip on the sword and noticed that a sense of presence had returned to the young warrior.

"Damn, Jamie, never have I seen such a battle! Not since Panama! We will make an example of him and hang his head at the wharf's edge for all to see. If only he were still alive I'd have him drawn and quartered first. Oh well, we can't have everything." He shrugged his massive shoulders. "Woman, see to the girl!" he bellowed to his wife.

"Come, my boy, we'll wait downstairs till the young lady wants ye. Let's get ye cleaned up and a drink or two into ye."

Jamie held back, but Sir Henry would have his way. Billy threw the body over his shoulder and followed them downstairs as Lizzie recruited two female slaves to help her take care of Katy.

As consciousness returned, Katy was aware of tender, gentle hands administering to her. Remembrance tugged at her brain and she uttered a cry of distress.

"Now, now, don't be afraid, Katy. Everything will be all right."

Frantic eyes searched the room. "Jamie? Where is he? Is he hurt badly?" Her eyes fell upon the pool of blood in the middle of the room and she fell back against the pillow with a moan.

"There, there, child, everything is fine. Jamie is not badly injured. He is in the library with Harry, worrying about you."

"Oh, Lizzie, it was horrible. That awful, awful man—" Katy shuddered as the memory of those horrendous moments gripped her.

"I know, dear, I know. For years I have tried to get Harry to get rid of some of these animals. But he feels he owes them something since he was their admiral during the days of the Brotherhood. Since the King has demanded he clean the sea of this scum he has a hard time keeping them in hand. They know no honest labour and Harry can't allow too much piracy to go on lest the government get suspicious. But enough of this, you must rest now."

"I want Jamie."

"Of course, you do." Lizzie moved toward the door. Katy uttered a stifled cry and curled up into a ball.

The older woman rushed back to the bed. "Katy, what is it? What is the matter?"

"Oh, God! The pain..."

"The baby! Oh no, dear Lord, no, not the baby! Marcy, Marcy!"

A young Negro girl ran from the adjoining sitting room to her mistress' side.

"Quickly, girl! Go to Lucinda and tell her to come quickly, and to bring her herbs. Hurry, hurry!"

Lizzie bathed the frightened girl's face, soothing her with comforting words and assurances until the midwife arrived.

"Hurry, Lucinda, give her something! Do something to save the baby!"

The old, pecan-coloured woman moved slowly to the bed and laid her hand on Katy's belly. Nodding and murmuring to herself, the light brown hand moved here and there, seeking the answers to be found within the slightly swollen womb. When, at last, a reassuring kick protested against the intrusion pressed upon the dome of life, the hand, was removed. Turning to the large wooden box she had brought

with her, the midwife pushed the lid open, exposing a multitude of corked bottles.

"Wine," she muttered and it was brought immediately.

Removing a jar from the box and extracting a small amount of white powder, she dropped it into the wine. Then opening another bottle, she repeated the same process. Muttering strange foreign words and stirring the mixture at the same time she watched Katy with an intense stare.

The young woman moved her legs continually against the sheets, biting her lower lip to seal in the protests rising in the back of her throat with each pang. Searching, searing tentacles of aching dread crept slowly into the core of life with reaving fingers in search of her heart's treasure. With grasping hands she clutched her sides, the widened green eyes held the brown gaze in a terror-stricken grip. A contraction knotted the center of Katy's stomach, which could be seen through the thin gauze nightgown and she screamed.

Booted footsteps could be heard ascending the stairs and Jamie burst into the room. He rushed to the end of the bed, his eyes dark with worry. His knuckles whitened as he gripped the tall bed poster.

Lucinda lifted Katy's head gently. "Drink," she commanded. Katy took a sip. "Drink it all."

"Oh!" she shuddered. "It's horrible." She shuddered again as the bitterness set her teeth on edge.

"To save the baby, drink," Lucinda ordered softly.

Katy looked into the old woman's face at those words, then taking the glass in both hands, drank the opiate. The Negro laid her back gently.

"Now you must sleep and rest. We must raise her feet." The soft voice stroked Katy's already numbing mind with a mollifying, foreign twang.

"Will she lose the child?" Katy heard Jamie ask. His voice sounded as if it was coming from down the hallway.

"I don't know jist yet." Katy felt the gentle touch on her

womb again. "If we kin quell the pains, she may continue. Mistress, she hasta have this every three hours. If no blood shows we kin be sure, but till then..." she shrugged.

The pain was easing and Katy felt as if she were floating. She tried to say something to Jamie to relieve his mind, but her tongue refused to function. Besides she didn't know which Jamie to speak to, there seemed to be two of him. Her eyes were closed and the lids felt burdensome, it was too much effort to open them again. She thought she remembered someone giving her more of that vile tasting medicine, but she was so sleepy she couldn't be certain. Katy could hear Jamie's voice far, far away and tried to call to him to reassure him, but she had no strength to do so. She couldn't remember whether she had any more pain or not. She only wanted to sleep.

The sun was peeking through a crack in the draperies when she finally struggled up out of the velvet, black pit of unconsciousness. Something heavy was holding the sheet down on the right side of the bed and putting her hand out to explore its identity, came in contact with Jamie's long, soft mane. She looked down. He had fallen asleep with his head on the bed.

"Jamie."

Immediately he was awake and with a groan gathered her in his arms. "Katy, I have been so—" He dropped his head against her shoulder and she felt a shudder go through him as he struggled to control himself. A feeling of surprise touched her, for she never expected a response such as this from him.

"The baby?" she asked hesitantly.

"He is a hardy and stubborn Bartlett all right. I believe he is going to stick around for awhile."

"Thank God," she whispered.

Her hand reached out and touched his face. A soft look of bemusement settled across her brow at the unusual expression in Jamie's eyes. The eyelids were red-rimmed and a strange mistiness glistened faintly. A flush faintly glowed

from beneath the deeply bronzed hue and a faint smile of embarrassment passed his lips. He cleared his throat nervously.

"Lucinda said you must be very careful for awhile. No more excitement of any kind. She is going to send some of those herbs with us to Virginia in case you have any more pain."

"Hold me closely, Jamie. I don't want you to ever let me go."

"Nay, love. I will forfeit my life first." He held her in his arms and whispered silly love words in her ear until she smiled and finally laughed with him.

"Must I remain abed?"

"At least a week."

"My trousseau. Oh, Jamie, I'll never get it finished. I'll never get married at this rate."

"We have five months to get you well and wedded, my love."

"What?" she feigned anger. "Would you wait, beast that you are, to wed me the day the child is delivered?" She pouted as she viewed herself, "As fat as I grow, you'll have to roll me down the aisle." She smoothed the sheet across her stomach and hips, both noting the slight bulge with grateful hearts.

"Aye, beast that I am, to make sure all is well with both you and the babe, I would wait to put that precious parchment of yours into your hands until after the babe is bred."

She knew this would be a blow to him. If she had to crawl to the altar she would make sure Jamie's baby was born in wedlock, for she knew how the hate consumed him for his Father's selfish act.

"We won't have to put it off, for I feel better already. Just having you hold me is all the medicine I need." She nuzzled his ear.

"Careful, my sweet, Lucinda said *all* excitement until

after the baby comes." Amusement tugged at the corners of his mouth, but frustration lurked in his eyes.

A knock sounded at the door. Jamie laid her back onto the bed. "Come."

Lizzie came in carrying a tray of food and medicine with Sir Henry following at her heels.

"I buy her all kinds of help, then she ends up luggin' things herself," he grumbled.

"This is for Katy. This, I want to do myself." She smiled at the invalid. "Open the draperies, Jamie, and let some air and sunlight into this dreary place." It was then that Katy noticed she was in a different room. She felt relieved, for she had no desire to relive those horrible moments of yesterday.

"Now you must eat and then take your medicine."

Katy wrinkled her nose in distaste.

"Do not worry, Lizzie, she will follow your instructions to the letter," Jamie assured her.

He sat beside her bed encouraging Katy to eat. "Remember, you are feeding two very important people now." He reminded her.

When she had eaten all she could, he held out the doctored wine to her. She screwed up her face in revulsion.

"Come on, drink it quickly and it won't be so vile."

"You should have to drink it, if you think it won't be so vile," she mimicked the last, drinking the bitter medicine.

Reaching out she touched his lacerated cheek above the wound, "Does it hurt?"

"Only when I smile, therefore, I plan on frowning quite a bit for awhile. So beware."

"Does your chest hurt?"

"Do not worry so, Katy. Both wounds are superficial and will probably not even leave a scar. The most important thing is that you were not harmed too badly and we are able to have our baby."

"You really want this babe badly, don't you, love?" she teased.

"Almost as much as I want his mother." He kissed her gently.

"My poor Jamie. Five months *is* a long time isn't it?"

"A lifetime, my little temptress."

Chapter 10

The long week of lying abed was finally over and the mansion was in a whirl. June tenth had been set for the wedding day and preparations were even now in the making.

Katy opened the large double doors to the balcony. Even though it was still early morning, the sun beamed down its radiant heat. She and Jamie enjoyed the cooler side of the house, but in the heat of the oppressive day, there was no cool place to be.

During her recovery Jamie had taken her for a stroll several times through the lovely garden where they were to be married. The vivid array of colors in the well-tended, lush green arbour was breathtaking. Jamie had pointed out the foreign, yet gorgeous beauties of the orange and scarlet Poinciana shrub; the fragile, thin petaled Poinsettias, which the Spanish had admired in Montezuma's kingdom, nodded their scarlet, pink and white heads in the evening's cooling breeze. Bright purplish-red drooping flowers growing from a great shrub in the corner of the garden were known as

fuchsia, Jamie informed her. But the most beautiful and most delicate of all was the orchid, sending out its array of colours ranging from a faint bluish to a reddish-purple hue. Katy buried her face in a cluster of them, then raised wondering eyes upward.

Jamie raised his eyebrow at her puzzlement.

"There's no fragrance."

He picked one of the bluish-white petals and tucked it in her bodice between her breasts.

"With some things, beauty needs no other trappings."

From below, the laughing voices of the slaves as they prepared the decorations for her wedding broke into her reverie. The smell of breads, cakes and the many varieties of delicacies invaded the house. The Negro slaves were beside themselves with happiness and anticipation, for when their Mistress gave a fête everybody joined in, and this promised to be the grandest celebration the island had ever known. An open invitation had been extended to the Brotherhood to attend the garden party and wedding, and in Port Royal Jamie and Sir Henry had made arrangements for the island people to enjoy themselves also.

"Are you going to stay in this room all day or would you like to go into town and pick up a very special gown?"

She whirled eagerly and rushed into his arms. "Oh, Jamie, it is really going to happen, isn't it?"

"There is no escape for me now. Sir Henry says he will bring me to the altar with a cutlass at my back if my feet falter but one step," he chuckled.

"Do your feet falter, Jamie? Are you sorry?"

"Only that it has taken so long. When I think of all the pain and heartache that I have caused you, I could kick myself." He kissed her on the cheek.

She longed for one of those long, passionate kisses that left both of them weak and trembling.

Jamie was stopped several times by old comrades and congratulated on the impending demise of his bachelorhood.

No remarks were directed to Katy, but sly glances appraised the beautiful young woman standing beside the handsome brigand. Irritation gnawed at her at the delay. She was eager to see her wedding dress. She looked around at their immediate surroundings.

The narrow street continued toward the dock area and for as far as her eye could see there were establishments in which all appeared to cater to the same type of people with whom Jamie was at the moment so deeply engrossed. The men were deeply tanned from the searing rays of the tropical sun in which they laboured all day while aboard ship. All were dressed in the now familiar garb of the Hawk's crew, that of the drab white, cotton cut-off pantaloons and sleeveless jerkins. It would appear today that Captain Bartlett was the only one to insist upon wearing anything other than the piratical uniform.

A sailor staggered drunkenly out of the dingy building behind them, nearly knocking Katy over in his vain attempt to right himself. Fumbling hands and bony elbows found their curious and prodding way to the proper places in the entanglement which followed. Katy and her stumbling admirer bumped into Jamie with Katy uttering a shriek as the fumbling hands caressed her boldly and for one scant moment the dull, misty eyes cleared in surprise and a leer passed his mouth. Angrily she shoved him away and Jamie became aware of sharp bony elbows digging into his ribs. A drunken, mumbled apology was given as his companions laughingly grabbed the fellow away and set him on his faltering feet and way.

With a mirthful chuckle Jamie turned to the dishevelled, piqued young woman beside him. Swooping up the trampled, wide-brimmed straw hat, he held it out to her. The full sensuous lips were tightened in anger, while her smoldering eyes flashed jade glints of fire and fury. The flaming tresses were in disarray, tumbling riotously about her stiffened shoulders. The square cut décolletage of the pale green gown rode askew upon her rising and falling

bosom, her modesty being rescued from the rapacious eyes of his comrades only by the ruching of delicate lace trim ornamenting the bodice.

Katy flipped a curl which had fallen across her shoulder backwards and a most unladylike growl escaped her lips as she snatched the hat from his hand.

"Temper, my love? Have I been harbouring a shrew unawares these many months?"

His hand found her elbow and led her to a small alleyway between two buildings. His eyes searched her face bemusedly at the sudden change of her mood. An amused smile dwelt upon his lips.

"That—that man was not drunk! He did that deliberately."

"He did what deliberately?"

"That little shuffling act of his—so he could fondle me. Look at my dress!"

A distinct dirty hand print revealed itself against the pale verdant lawn gown, over the area covering her left breast. She paused in her task of trying to brush the offending mark away to watch Jamie search his waistcoat. Laughter filled his throat and then the air as he released the amusement.

"I fail to see anything that amusing about the whole disgusting affair, sir," she snapped.

"You are correct, love. That little act was deliberate. I am afraid your little amorous character fondled—as you so quaintly put it—both of us, but not for the reason you think. He was a cut purse."

"Cut purse?"

"A pickpocket, and I am afraid he got away with all that I had."

Katy looked down to the front of her dress. "Jamie, my brooch is gone! Oh, Jamie—"

"No great loss, my sweet, as long as Spain continues to carry her treasures to Phillip across these waters I can get more."

He led her back into the byway. "Come, let's get a bite to

eat before we find Mistress Corday and you will have a chance to regain your composure. I just happen to know a place nearby."

A large grey, weather-beaten, two story building loomed before them, and with his hand against the small of her back he guided her through the open door. Once inside Katy paused until her eyes adjusted to the faint light in the immense room. Small tables with chairs squatting sedately around them stood scattered throughout the room, a few of them occupied by seamen taking their ease and sipping their ale. Behind the long, planked, holystoned counter stood a short man with a balding head and a patch over one eye. With long sweeping motions he wiped at the already polished area with a large sponge. He dipped his head in recognition of the tall man. All eyes were on the newly arrived couple. Jamie nodded to those he knew, then catching the barkeep's good eye pointed upstairs as he maneuvered Katy toward the stairs.

"Bring us something to eat, Parker."

"Aye, sir." He grinned knowingly.

Katy looked at Jamie over her shoulder questioningly. He nodded his head toward the top floor, with his hand still at her back Katy mounted the stairs slowly. Looking below at the upturned faces, her face flamed and her step faltered. Jamie grabbed her arm, then slipped his hand around her waist. Pointing to a closed door across the hall, he guided her forward.

Suddenly he was taken by surprise as warm, ardent arms encircled his neck and soft, hot lips caressed his mouth. Startled, he stood quietly receiving the passionate kiss, then pushed the young lady gently away, untangling himself from the zealous embrace.

"Jamie, love!"

"Charlie, well—ah—what a surprise." He stammered.

Katy could see the embarrassment tinging his face and ears and an amused smile tugged at the corner of her mouth, until she appraised the young woman. She had soft, brown

hair gathered together at the nape of her neck as Jamie wore his on board ship. Grey eyes glinted arrogantly at Katy, as she stood hands on hips and breasts thrust out. Brazenly, she wore her skirt cut off below her knees, exposing long, shapely legs and ankles. Her blouse fell off her shoulders which were smooth and tan. Katy knew she was being appraised just as closely.

"What's this about ye gettin' married, Jamie love?"

"Well, yes—in a couple of days."

"Kinda in a rush, huh?" Her eyes traveled over Katy's body. Defiantly, Katy's head came up and she glared at the smiling cocotte. Then raising her eyes she saw the dark scowl creeping over Jamie's face. All of a sudden Charlie's face broke into an impish smile and she leaned over and kissed Katy's cheek.

"Don't blame ye, Jamie love. She's a beauty, fer sure." She turned back to Katy. "Make 'im happy, honey. Devil that he is, he deserves it. One has yet to see 'im fully content. Everyone thinks he's too mean to be happy, except us who knows 'im." She pulled Jamie's head down once more and kissed him on the mouth, then ran down the stairs.

Katy felt as if a whirlwind had swept in and immediately darted out again.

"Who was that?" she asked in surprise.

"That—was Charlotte Mowbray," Jamie replied hesitatingly. "She is a girl I used to know."

"Very well, I take it."

He frowned, unable to fathom her matter-of-fact voice. She laughed at his perplexity.

"If Sir Henry had not promised to deliver you to the altar himself, I would scratch her eyes out."

He shook his head, pursing his lips. "Women."

Once seated inside the small room Katy looked around her. The windows opened upon the harbour and the many vessels moored at the docks looked abandoned and desolate. Inside, the room was plain and crude, with only the essential items needed for comfort, a bed, unusually narrow for

Jamie's selection—Her womanly mind prickled as the thought flitted through, wondering how many times the girl Charlie had shared that meager pallet with him. With concentrated effort she returned her thoughts to the present and continued the survey of the chamber. The table at which she sat, just large enough for two, her mind reminded her.

"Stop it," she commanded herself, "he's mine now. I will share him with no one!"

"Two high backed, cane chairs," her mind snapped loud enough that she started momentarily, thinking she had said the words aloud. Her eyes turned to Jamie standing at the windows watching the ships, he gave no sign that he had heard any strange outburst from her. Her eyes lingered on the long, trim form before venturing on.

A small commode with a veined marble top squatted against the wall, a large wash bowl and pitcher occupying the marble top. In the far corner stood the necessary screened area for the morning ablution. The only luxury Katy saw was the thick, brown and gold Persian carpet on the floor.

When Jamie had felt her eyes upon him he had turned for her comment. Now he stood watching her as she sat looking at her surroundings lost in thought.

"My home away from home," Jamie explained.

She looked up at him wonderingly, "I don't understand."

"This is where I live when I am in Jamaica."

"But it—it's so modest." She viewed the room again. "I thought perhaps you stayed with Sir Henry when you visited here."

"When I am in Port Royal my needs are modest. When I want luxury I return to the Hawk. I do not stay with Sir Henry as he tends to try to run my life and that I won't abide. He was forever inviting young ladies with possessive eyes and warm hearts yearning for hearth and home to dine with us. He and Lizzie could not bear the thought of me unattached. I used my relationship with Amelia the last few years to shield me from their conniving plottings toward the marriage bed. I believe I have at last given them their ease."

Now they can direct their efforts on some other young frustrated bachelor."

A knock sounded. "Come."

The black patched barkeep entered carrying a tray with a light repast of cold, sliced roast beef, cheese, bread and wine upon it. Setting it on the table he eyed Katy intently with the one good eye, then turned his attention on the Captain.

"Welcome back, Captain. The men below said ye was finally took intoil by a bonny lass and I figure this colleen must be the one—fer a bonny lass she be."

"Aye, Parker, I have finally dipped my colours like many a brave man and will steer under a new banner." His eyes rested warmly upon Katy. "And I yield willingly—not to mention eagerly," he grinned at the man.

"Aye, sir, she has the looks o' a lass a man could box the compass with."

"Aye, that she does," Jamie agreed softly.

When at last they presented themselves at Madame Corday's Ladies Mercantile Shoppe the afternoon was well spent and the shop appeared to be empty. Katy browsed while Jamie went to find the owner. The counters were covered with stacks of materials of a riotous rainbow of colours. Sheer muslins, delicately smooth linens, filmy batistes for all those lovely undergarments Lizzie had ordered for her trousseau. Katy ran her hand caressingly over the display of materials: silks, satins, laces, lawns, brocades, velvets, wools and cottons of every hue imaginable. Her mind swirled with the excitement of seeing the richness of the looms of the world on view before her. From the rear of the store she could hear the couturière answering a question of Jamie's.

"Ah, mademoiselle, ye are feelin' better. Good, good. The wedding trousseau is all ready. I shall be out tomorrow ter make any changes ye find necessary."

"I am certain everything will be beautiful."

"Great Lord Harry, is all of this to go with us?"

"Aye, sir."

"We will need a carriage of our own, perhaps two, to carry all this—" he waved his hand in helpless confusion. "I think I had better send a message to Harry and hire our own vehicle. Is there some place Katy can rest while I attend to this?"

"Yes, of course, Captain. It's safe she'll be here with me, sir."

"Good. I will be back shortly, darling." He squeezed her hand and hurried off.

"Ah, such a handsome man. Come to the back of me shop, dearie. Everything be ready except yer wedding dress and it's the finishing touches we be puttin' on it now."

She led Katy to a lounge where she could recline and rest. "Please, may I see the gown?"

"My helper, Mistress Parsons, has it at home. When Captain Bartlett sent word sayin' ye'd be comin' in today Peggy and I worked far into the night to try to finish it fer today. Peggy be sewin' the pearls on it and hemmin' it. I did all the rest of it meself. Oh, miss, 'tis the most beautiful gown I've ever made. But I'll be out first thing in the mornin' to make shore it's to yer likin'. The Captain told me to go on and do it on me own when ye was so ill. Air ye all right now?" she asked curiously.

"Yes, I am well." A sense of panic welled up into Katy's throat as unbidden thoughts buffeted her memory.

"Must'a been a terrible ordeal for ye."

Katy shuddered, remembering how close she had come to losing the baby.

"Bernis de Bardagne always were an animal. Captain Bartlett had every right to dispatch him to the devil, which is no doubt in anybody's mind as to where he went straight t'."

"Please, Madam Corday..."

"To think that fiend laid hands on a lady like ye."

"I'd just soon not discuss it, please." A slight trace of hysteria edged the muffled plea.

"O' course, o' course." There was a silence for a moment

or two. "Guess he climbed up the balcony, huh?"

Katy closed her eyes shuddering inwardly as the scenes passed through her mind again.

"Course I kin see Bardagne doin' what he tried t' do, as pretty as ye air. He always did fancy hisself as a ladies' man, bein' French and all."

Katy could feel his brutal hands and mouth defiling her again and perspiration broke out on her forehead; her heart quickened and she felt compelled to listen to the soft-spoken voice.

"But jist seems a shame t' put a nice lady in yer condition through somethin' like thet. 'Twas a good thing the Captain come up t' check on ye or it's hard t' tell what would'a happened to ye. Never knew the Captain were thet good with a sword. 'Course everybody knew Bernis were good, he's kilt dozens o' men."

Katy envisioned the slashing swords gleaming in the dim candlelight. Bardagne's rapier rent the air and the tip ripped through Jamie's shirt drawing blood. Katy's face whitened as the scene continued until once more her eyes saw Jamie with gore dripping down his face onto his chest. Her breath was coming in great racking sobs and Madam Corday was down on her knees trying to calm the anguished girl.

Jamie arrived on the scene and in unquelled fury swept the older woman out of his way with a swoop of his large hands, he pulled Katy to him.

"Jamie, Jamie, I thought you were hurt."

"I am all right, Katy. Sh-h." He raised dark, angry eyes to the seamstress and demanded, "What happened here?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. We was talkin' about—well, about what happened to her the other night and she jist all of a sudden started takin' on, sir." The woman stammered fearfully.

He scowled at the seamstress and she cowered at the animosity in the glower. "Never will that be mentioned to her again! Do you understand!"

"Aye, sir," she assented quickly.

"Get our packages into the carriage right away. Get one of those children out there to help you," he ordered harshly.

She hurried to do his bidding while he continued to comfort the upset girl. Once the packages were all loaded he carried Katy to the carriage. She lay on the upholstered seat and Madam Corday brought a pillow for her head. Jamie sat on the jump seat holding her hand.

"Cap'n, ain't the purty lady feelin' good?" a young Negro boy asked looking through the door curiously.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Sam, sir. I brung the purty lady's packages out fer y'."

"The pretty lady will be just fine, Sam. Here, buy you and your friends some candy." Jamie tossed a coin, which Sam caught expertly, white teeth gleaming.

"Thank ya, sir. Thank ya." He pulled at his wide brimmed hat and then a handful of laughing, happy boys left a trail of dust behind them.

"I think both of my promises have now been fulfilled." Jamie told Katy placing the rolled up scroll in her hands.

"Aye, my lord—" she taunted with sparkling eyes as he frowned down at her, "and master," she continued, smiling beguilingly.

The silver threads in the black doublet glittered in the soft glow of the lamp. White ermine decorated the plain cut of the ebony coat. An enormous diamond pendant rested against the wide expanse of his chest. The ever familiar black breeches embraced his lean hips and long legs. Her warm, loving gaze caressed his every move, then dropped to the scroll once more.

As she examined the precious paper, he viewed this gorgeous creature he now called wife. Madam Corday was correct. The gown was a lovely creation in its pale yellow satin, overlaid with a delicate white lace. The neck scooped provocatively low, hinting much, revealing little—just enough to tantalize him. The sleeves fluffed voluminously to

the elbow where they were gathered tightly, then extended straight into a V two or three inches beyond the white lace mitts. The dress was decorated with hundreds of pearls of the most ethereal opalescent beauty. The long train was of the same delicate lace as the overlay and trailed out behind her. Jamie in his nervousness had several times found his large, Cordovan leather clad feet tangled in the filmy stuff. She now had it wrapped around her arm out of his way.

When he had lifted the pearl trimmed, Spanish lace veil and revealed her beautiful, glowing face, raising it to his own for the sealing kiss, he had felt he would never release her. Smiling faintly to himself, he remembered the approving murmurs of the guests which had filled Sir Henry's garden as he had held her in that kiss extra long. Viewing her now, he knew he at last possessed the perfect gem he had coveted so long.

Hesitant steps took him to her side. Katy looked up from the document smiling shyly. He took her in his arms gently, whispering her name as his mouth moved across willing lips. His hand caressed the intoxicating softness pressing lightly against him, and with a small groan crushed her tightly against the hardness of his lean frame and aching loins. Once gentle, his lips now pressed upon hers in a demanding way, his tongue parted yielding lips to dine upon the sweetness found there. Katy arched against him, sleeping passions awakened by the fervour of his impassioned kiss. Suddenly he wrenched his mouth away and stepped away from her. Sweat beaded his forehead, dark eyes gleamed like burning coals against the unfamiliar pallid complexion.

"Jamie—"

It was an effort to raise his hands as if to ward her off.

"No—stay there, Katy," he told her huskily. His eyes had softened, revealing hurt and disappointment.

"Jamie, what's the matter?" she cried in alarm.

His eyes revealed the changing emotions tearing through him, until at last she watched that one most dreaded of all take possession.

"What is it, my lovely innocent wife?" The derisive laugh was directed to himself. "It would appear that we shall have an ideal wedding night, one that a husband looks forward to in his many amorous wanderings of imagination, beloved wife. It would do us both well if I returned to the Hawk," was his bitter reply.

"No, Jamie, please don't leave me."

"A lot of good it will do either of us to be together this night. I want to touch you, I want to hold you, God knows, I want to love you, but I don't dare." He threw his head back, releasing that despicable laugh. "When you stop to think about it, it is almost comical. Here we are, newlyweds, deeply in love and of all nights, our wedding night," his voice hardened, "and all we can do is either sit and look at one another or go to sleep in different beds, lest the husband in his lust rapes the wife—which he has already done, thus bringing about the unfulfilled wedding night. It is like going around in a circle and meeting yourself and not enjoying that which you see. Mother of God, what irony, to see my own carnal designs turned back upon myself, riding me like a blunt sword." A low oath of frustration broke his lips and he turned from her.

She ran to him, "Don't, Jamie, I love you. Do what you will."

"But the baby—"

"We can have other babies." Tears flowed down her cheeks.

He shook her angrily. "Do not tempt me, woman! I want *this* baby, as do you."

She sagged against him sobbing. "All I know at this time is that I love you and can't bear to see you miserable."

His hand held her face against his chest. He lifted her chin so he could look into her eyes and smiled grimly, "We could have Harry send up a tub of cold water and take turns soaking in it."

Inadvertantly, she giggled and a sob caught in her throat. Gently he wiped her tears away.

"We had better get ready to go downstairs, my love. After all this great feast is to honour the happy bride and groom and I am inclined to believe the more people around and the less I am able to fondle you, the happier I will be."

Katy rinsed her face in cool water hoping it would soothe her red, tear-swollen face. Straightening her veil and dress, she turned and faced her husband with a brave smile.

"Beautiful." He held out his arm to her, then escorted the lovely bride down the elegantly curved mahogany staircase. A loud cheer echoed throughout the great hall below as the Hawk's crew and buccaneers greeted the handsome couple. From then on it was a wedding feast never to be forgotten.

Katy was nearly torn from Jamie's arms, and for most of the evening was passed from one pair of manly arms to another. The newly wedded husband was hard pressed to keep up with his beauteous spouse. Sparkling eyes looking coyly into an enchanted buccaneer's face piqued him no end. Smiling lips laughing at a brigand's clumsy joke or tale grated upon jealous nerves. Katy's searching eyes found the dark form diligently holding up a thick-hewn marble pillar. The music ended and Katy moved toward Jamie. He espied her path for him and pushed himself away from the cold column eagerly. A low growl sounded in his throat as she surrendered herself reluctantly to another pair of willing arms. Jamie fell back, feeling the cold bite of the swollen shaft between his shoulder blades; a low groan was muffled angrily.

Lizzie walked to his side, smiling widely at him. "Don't frown so, it frightens all the ladies."

He folded his arms across his chest, murmuring under his breath in discontent.

"Behold, the happy groom." Lizzie laughed, offering him her glass.

"'Tis easy for you to revel in my plight, my Lady, but 'tis a rent in my sail to know that all my husbandry duties are being denied me this night," he snarled, then emptied her glass in one motion.

"But there are the many to follow," she reminded.

"That does not lessen the ache of the emptiness of this night," he snarled.

"The belated wail of all over-anxious, lusty suitors, Captain," she scolded.

Jamie shifted his position in annoyance. "Don't preach, Lizzie, I know my shortcomings," he snapped.

His eyes sought one of the servants with a full tray and beckoned him over. Relieving the tray of a goblet, he motioned the man to stay beside him and drained the glass quickly, then traded the empty glass for a full one, waving the black away.

A small jerk on his sleeve and he found himself looking down into shimmering pools of happiness. "Hello, love," she cooed.

The black mood surrounding him dissipated before her glowing face as early morning mist before the awakening sun. He grinned down upon her boyishly.

"Shall we go out on the terrace for a breath of air?" she asked fanning her flushed face with her handkerchief.

He tucked her hand in his arm and moved through the throng daring anyone to approach her again. Once outside Jamie and Katy were confronted with the elaborate preparations the Governor and his wife had gone to to fête the friend and comrade of the former pirate admiral. A great beef was roasting over an open pit on a spit turned by two young blacks. There were ducks, pigs and geese all roasting and baking and basking in diverse ways.

Harry waved a great goblet of Jamaican rum and yelled something unintelligible to them. Everyone's hand held a cup or a mug of heady brew, toasting the bride and groom.

Large tables covered with great linen cloths groaned under the weight of fruits, vegetables, breads, cakes and delicacies of all kinds. Music came from inside the great hall, softly and romantically. The dancing and toasting continued all night and into the day. Somewhere around midnight when the guests looked for the bride and groom they found

they had somehow slipped away.

Jamie had told Sir Henry to throw pieces of eight to the guests as a token of his respect and affection. After a long winded speech, thick from the native rum, Sir Henry delivered the chest of money to one of the slaves to toss to the crowd and promptly passed out. Lizzie had him carried to bed and resigned herself to a long vigil until the other guests either joined her husband or left to enjoy the festivities in Port Royal. That drunken, merrymaking celebration lasted for three more days, until nearly everyone had collapsed either from exhaustion or drink. After the gala affair had ended, the happy couple followed the heavy laden wagons to the Hawk to prepare for the trip to Virginia.

Katy lingered on deck only long enough to wave her goodbyes to her new found friends.

The creak of the windlass and the clatter of the chains told her the anchor was being raised. Men were swarming aloft to set the sails for the journey home. She felt the slight lurch of the great ship as it surrendered itself to the welcoming embrace of the water and the monstrous hulk moved on the waves as light as a duck's feather.

The warehouses and shanties fell behind. Sir Henry and Lizzie waved their handkerchiefs in a last farewell and turned toward their waiting carriage.

The narrow channel slipped by; the intense sun rays flashed off the shimmering sandy bottom. Sun devils shivered slowly above the fort and the cannon cast back a sharp glare, momentarily blinding those on board the retreating vessel. Then a loud *BOOM* erupted from the mouths of the cannon from Point Mayfield and then Point Pelican fired her final farewell as the Blue Mountains huddled inside the hazy blanket covering them and the emerald lushness of the island faded into the sea.

Chapter 11

The days were once again peaceful and quiescent. Katy lazed under the black and silver striped canopy, reading or daydreaming of the new life awaiting her in the foreign land called Virginia.

A new day dawned misty and drear, abruptly ending the usual sun drenched days. She lay watching Jamie sleep. A smile lit up her face and her eyes caressed his peaceful, relaxed countenance. Gone were the cruel, embittered lines around mouth and eyes. A calm, tranquil semblance of boyishness lay on his softened features.

Pulling a feather out of the seam of the pillow and giggling softly, she tickled him under the nose. He twitched the hawk-like beak back and forth, rocking his mustache like a boat. Covering her mouth and giggling, she tickled once more. His large hand brushed across his face as he wrinkled his nose in irritation. Her soft laughter woke him and he watched her through slit eyes. As her hand crept forth again, he issued a loud yell, frightening her and wrestled the feather

away. While holding her down with his body, he ran the feather beneath her nose and behind her ears, then covered her mouth with light, fluttering kisses. His dark eyes danced and a deep rumble of laughter broke in his throat. Giggling, Katy pushed playfully at his hard chest.

"You pirate beast, shall I raise my voice in terror and call the crew to my rescue?"

"The crew would not save you, my sweet. I would cut them all down with my trusty cutlass to make you mine."

His hands grasped her shoulders and bore her down beneath him while his lips ravished her. Suddenly all laughter ceased and looking deeply into Katy's eyes Jamie's mood changed and the change swept across his hawkish features. Swirling with the tempest of his emotions, his eyes lost in an undercurrent, the desire revealed lashed her mercilessly wherever it touched.

The fury of his need fanned the flames of consuming passion and Katy melted in his embrace. "Jamie, Jamie," she whispered, as frantic hands pulled him closer against the soft, yielding flesh. "Love me, please, love me."

Her touch was a surging torrent teasing through him in tides of agonizing bliss. He groaned and tried to pull away. "Katy, no." His voice pled hoarsely. "We can't—God help me, I could take you now without thought nor care of the babe—or you."

"Then take me, Jamie. Don't be afraid." She placed his hand on her breast and held it there tightly.

"No—Katy—" He moaned as she kissed his opened mouth, nibbled his lower lip, running her tongue gently and teasingly across it.

She felt the pressure of his lean, hard body lighten as he attempted to rise from her. One hard-thewed leg lay between hers and she imprisoned it. Against her loins she felt the stabbing, pulsating warmth and bold hardness of him.

"Katy—for God's sake—"

Thrusting her demanding body against him she cried hoarsely, "Yes, Jamie, now! I want you, I need you!"

Silken arms encircled his neck pulling him downward. The soft curves taunted him with a rending delight, stabbing through the hardened muscles in his belly which were balled into a painful spasm. His hands grabbed at her wrists to pull them away; fervent eyes met and resistance fled. He groaned as the trenchant blade of passion severed all threads of sanity.

"Damn you!" he cursed through clenched teeth. Defenceless against the raging storm buffeting his weakened resolve, he pinned her shoulders to the mattress cruelly, "God damn you!"

He mounted her and the look of loathing on his face frightened Katy, for she didn't know to whom it was directed. He thrust at her angrily, despising himself with every lunge, unable and unwilling to halt the assault upon her and the child. Soaring passions overpowered common reasoning. Towering waves of excruciating delight swept Katy to overwhelming heights of violent ardour. Even as desires rose to become as one, so also was the welding of the enraptured lovers. When the tumult subsided and reason returned, Jamie thrust himself to the side of the bed and remained there in silence for long agonising moments. With disgust and remorse etched in agony on his unyielding face, he sat with his head in his hands.

"My God! what am I! An animal? How could I risk everything I long for for a few moments of lust? Everywhere I turn it isn't James Bartlett I find, but Thomas." He shoved himself from the bed.

"Jamie, don't—! Don't blame yourself. Blame me, too. I can't bear not having you touch me—love me. I think I am going mad from the sheer want of you." He turned his back on her.

She sat up on the side of the bed, leaning forward anxiously, pleadingly. "Oh, God, Jamie, please listen to me. Please, don't turn from me. I love you!" He looked at her through that hateful mask of his, glaring and promising nothing.

"We both know how we feel about the baby. Lucinda gave me some of her herbs. I have been taking them faithfully. She said they will help to protect the baby. Come, feel how strong he kicks."

"Herbs! Voodoo! Mumbo-jumbo!" His voice cut her savagely. "We both must be mad!" He continued dressing. "Damn that black witch woman. If she has fed you a cock-and-bull story I will kill her the next time I am in Jamaica and hang her head on a pike next to Bardagne." He walked to the door and turned angrily toward her. "From now on, madam, we both shall be better off in separate rooms!" The door resounded with his wrath as he left.

Katy lay back dry-eyed and empty, staring at the ceiling.

Katy was lounging in the outer cabin reading when she heard footfalls in the companionway. Many voices were yelling and calling to one another. Hurrying to the door she stood watching the pell-mell confusion around her. She tried to stop several of the rushing men, but they swept past shaking her hand away.

Jamie was running against the tide of moving men, pushing and shoving as he came. His face was immobile and unreadable. Grabbing her arm he forced her back into the cabin, his eyes held the dark obsidian glower she hated.

"This time I will take time to explain to you why you are to remain here." He told her in a cold, clipped, impatient voice. "We have sighted a ship through this damnable fog, probably Spanish since these are the waters they lay claim to. Because of this muck we have very little windpower. So far they evidently have not sighted us. There does not seem to be much activity aboard her, so she may be a derelict, but we will not take that chance, thus we have cleared the deck of all unnecessary items. Do you understand me, madam, when I say *all* unnecessary items? And this time when I say stay below, I mean it! Understand!" His strong hands tightened around her arms, the pain surged into her shoulders.

"Yes, Jamie," she whispered, frightened at his grim, uncaring way.

"Do not come running after me; I am neither child nor idiot that I need a woman's protective skirt to shield me from the dangers of my chosen profession. Stay where I put you this time, understand!" His hands tightened again as he gave her an impatient shake.

The pain drew her to her full height and Katy's face whitened from the determination not to cry out. She bit at her lower lip to close off the cry that demanded to be heard. Without further bidding he turned and joined the hurrying throng in the corridor.

Katy commenced pacing and worrying below. Her measured step took her back and forth past the port window in Jamie's cabin and her anxious eye sought the darkness beyond vainly for a glimpse of the ship. She ran to the window and strained to see outside; not even a star greeted her fearful view; with a disconcerted cry she ran to the bedchamber and threw open one of the stern windows.

The dense fog billowed and rolled with the movement of the sea and the slight breeze. She shivered more from the dread of the unknown than the damp chill. The heavy grey mist enveloped everything in a thick, dewy mantle, seeming to shut out life and hope in its opaque, vaporous fingers, leaving her with an awesome forboding. The feeling that they were wandering lost and alone in a watery limbo overpowered her reasoning. Visions of being enclosed in the stygian gloom awaiting the hellish delights of the gods of the realms of Pluto overwhelmed her and she groaned and wrung her hands in distress, seeking desperately to thrust aside the morbid thoughts that besieged her from all sides.

"Ship, dead ahead! Port! Port!"

Katy felt the ship suddenly heave to and then heard the thudding sounds as the grappling hooks imprisoned the seemingly dead ship. Screams and yells shattered the stillness as a boarding party hit the enemy deck. Katy held her breath

lest she miss any crumb of information.

"Capt'n," there was a pause, "don't send anyone else over, sir. It's a plague ship."

Plague! The horrible word struck Katy as a blow.

"I will be right over, Mr. Cruse."

"Jamie, no!" She screamed and sank to her knees. The tight hand of fear encircled her throat and she fought back the nausea which heaved at her stomach and burned at her throat.

"The baby," a voice within her cried and she slammed the window shut. She sat in a frightened heap unable to move.

The morning sun tried vainly to break out of the thick bonds of mist which imprisoned it.

Jamie jumped to the captured vessel's deck. Bodies, living and dead, lay like cast aside dolls. Beside the flagmast lay a crumbled yellow banner, which he ordered raised. Mr. Cruse stood at his side as they viewed the derelict deck.

"Easiest catch we've ever made," the first mate remarked grinning widely.

"Hopefully. What kind of plague is it?"

"Appears more like ship's fever to me, and may have run its course."

"Get these bodies over the side and see how many men still live." He searched the deck with his eyes, "Is the Captain alive?"

"Aye, sir, he's below. The men are bringin' everyone topside now."

"Good. I want this ship washed down from stem to stern with vinegar and sulfur braziers burning right away."

"Aye, sir." Mr. Cruse moved away to issue the orders.

Jamie strode around the ship stepping over the dead and the dying. Off to larboard he saw one of his men kneeling over a prostrate Don and came up behind him. He watched the sailor's hand slip beneath the dying man's shirt as if searching for something.

"That which you seek had best be something of value."

The sailor froze at the harsh words from behind him, then turned on the ball of his foot to face the accuser. He rose slowly to his feet.

"I was seeking something of value, sir, a heart beat."

Jamie scrutinized the man closely but could not place him. Narrowed blue eyes looked into suspicious dark-hued ones as the two men judged one another.

"Or robbing him?" Jamie returned in a clipped voice.

The gaunt man drew himself up to his full height and Jamie found himself almost on a level with the angry man. He watched him struggle to keep his temper under control. A purplish scar caught the Captain's eye beneath the fringe of the square-cropped hair above the angry eyes.

"No, sir, just trying to see if he is still alive," came the stiff answer.

"Who are you, mister?"

"Josiah Denton, sir."

The Captain glanced down at the mangled left hand. "And what are you planning on doing if he is still alive?"

The man shifted his gaze to the Spaniard lying at their feet. "I don't know, sir." He returned the gaze to the Hawk's Captain. "I'm a doctor, but was also a victim of these butchers," Denton replied bitterly.

"Then I suggest, doctor, that you search your soul and find out just what you intend to do with your patients today—treat them or kill them."

Josiah Denton could feel the hatred rising and surging through his body. Memories of the agony he and his young brother had suffered at the hands of the Papist priest and soldiers pierced his mind. The Captain could see the inward conflict raging on the narrow face and in the steel blue eyes. Denton ran his good hand through his sunbleached hair.

Finally, in a firm husky voice he replied, "I took an oath a long time ago, Captain. Morally, I am required to honour that oath and will try to do so."

"Just remember to do it, sir. I do not allow unnecessary abuse of my prisoners, whether they be Spanish or heathen."

The Captain moved among the two crews. The Spaniards stood to one side dejectedly ill, some shuddered violently from the chills and fever, too sick to communicate the animosity they felt for the heretics who now held them captive. But Jamie noticed a few of the younger fanatic's black eyes blazing with unspoken malevolence.

With the dark scowl hardening his face, he wore an even more contemptuous expression than usual as he approached the alien crew.

"*Hable usted Inglés?*" he asked each until one nodded.

"Tell your comrades they will be treated well and receive medical attention as long as they obey. But if they choose not to do so, they will be hanged."

The shuddering, fevered sailor turned to those huddled in groups around him. In a voice weakened by the ravaging sickness which had brought the haughty crew to their enervated condition, he interpreted the demands of the Anglo apostate.

"*Dígale a sus compañeros que les trataremos bien; y que van a recibir atencion del medico—si se portan bien; y si no—iran todos al garrote!*"

Jamie watched the burning, acrimonious eyes turn on him as the Don's voice rose to a shrill tremor as the last words echoed in the foggy air. Dark eyes clashed with the obsidian hawkish glower and Jamie knew that the only thing keeping these defiant men from a mutiny was the weakening after effects of the fever raging inside them.

Hearing voices behind him he turned from the unspoken duel to find the Captain of the ship staggering up the companionway from his cabin. The swarthy complexion was a pasty white from the ravaging punishment of the fever. Large, dark circles lay deeply upon the sallow cheeks beneath the bleak stare. It was only arrogant pride and force of will which kept him on his feet. Jerking his arm from the

hand of his captor, he stiffened his back into a military demeanour.

He bowed ever so slightly to the Englishman. "Captain," he addressed him in nearly perfect English, "we regret we could not give you a warm welcome."

"Captain James Bartlett at your service, sir. Maybe the next time you can be more obliging, Captain."

"Don Alfredo Rodriquez." Another insolent bow. "You are the infamous pirate, Hawk, no?"

"I am the privateer known as Hawk, yes."

"The heretic who sits on your throne may call you by any name he pleases. His most Catholic Majesty prefers the name pirate, which you are."

Jamie returned scornfully, "I'll not split hairs with you over a name, Captain. For if I had my way Morgan would still be my Admiral and I would still be sinking every Spanish ship that sailed under my guns. You know and I know this sham of a peace can not last and when it ends we will seek you out willingly. Now to the business at hand.

"To all accounts, Captain, you have approximately fifty men still alive. Some sicker than others, but nevertheless, alive. We offer all the assistance we can—for a price."

"Of course, and that price?"

"Your cargo and ship."

The man's fever glazed eyes grew even brighter. "My ship! Never!"

A tight smile crossed Bartlett's hawk-like features, "Be satisfied with the lives I give you, Don Alfredo, for you have no choice; you, what is left of your crew and your ship are already mine."

"You will kill us then?"

"I am not above killing, Captain," the Englishman's voice lashed the Spaniard coldly, "but only if it is forced upon me. I would advise you to keep your crew in hand. Gentleman that you are, I would accept your parole for both you and your crew, if you would be so inclined to give it. Otherwise, I

will do what I feel is necessary to maintain discipline."

The Spaniard juttèd his chin forward angrily and measured the Englishman's mettle. His mind drew upon the information he knew about the brigand. Past knowledge revealed that the man known as the "Hawk" had ravaged the ships and towns of the Spanish Main without regard or mercy. Rodriguez knew the picaroon was not above murdering him and his men if the situation demanded it; but strangely enough, the pirate also appeared to have a chivalrous streak in him and was known to honour his word.

"You have my parole, Captain, as an officer in his majesty's navy and as a gentleman. Now, if you would just put us ashore at Port Bello—"

"I am afraid not, senor, I plan on putting you ashore at Santo Domingo. Your people should find you there and help you. I am in a slight hurry at the moment and must forego anything except a chance meeting with your countrymen, as much as I regret it."

The Don's scowl rivaled one of Bartlett's own at the disappointing words. "If the cursed Indians don't find us first."

Bartlett shrugged, "That is your problem and has been from the first time you betrayed them."

"Captain, I can see where the lack of refinement abides. 'Tis you who shirks the graces of being a gentleman."

Jamie's breath ceased and his body stiffened at the insult.

"Denton!" he shouted.

Josiah came to his side. Jamie grabbed up his mutilated hand and shoved it into the Spaniard's face.

"You dare to speak of refinement and grace to me, sir? Tell it to this man!" he hissed and stamped off.

Denton stood for several seconds with his hand outstretched, with eyes and brand on his forehead blazing, then spat at the Spaniard's feet and followed his captain.

Bartlett learned that the carrack, Del Norte Lux, was one of six ships which had left Peru, with a stopover at Panama, gathering the riches of the New World at the different ports

on their way to Porto Bello. They had contracted the fever at Panama which was literally on its knees with the populus dying by the hundreds. The other ships had sped on their ways since Port Bello was only twenty leagues away. The Spanish Admiral, Don Estaban Garcia, felt the plague ship could make its own way safely in the fog.

It took the rest of the afternoon to unload the rich cargo into the hold of the Hawk. Jamie and Mr. Cruse were in the Captain's cabin listing the contraband, both pleased at the day's profits. Jamie stretched and rose from his desk.

"Too bad all of our prizes are not this easy."

"How much do ye figure we've taken, Captain?"

Jamie consulted the inventory, "Fifty thousand pieces of eight as near as can be approximated; sixty bars of gold and whatever we can auction the jewels and religious artifacts for."

"God's truth! We need to go back into accountin' jist fer the hell of it." The first mate grinned, "Not to mention the profits."

"But it was too easy. The hackles at the back of my neck tell me we had better be getting the hell out before we find ourselves looking down the throats of Spanish cannon. Remember there are five other ships out there somewhere, they just might get it into their heads to come back for Rodriquez."

A rap came at the door and Don Alfredo shoved his way inside, confronting the Captain, "I was led to believe you were a man of honour," he snarled. "But I should have known better, honour is something the English abandoned a long time ago."

"I'm sorry, sir, I tried to stop him—" the young man stammered.

"Forget it, Tom. Go on about your business," he told the flustered crewman, but when he turned back to the Spaniard all trace of kindness had disappeared.

"You are no different than any of the other foul-mouth

Ingles lying pirates, for all your prattle. You said you do not believe in unnecessary cruelty, yet two of my men have been put to the torture! Bastardo!" With the epithet, he slashed his heavy glove across the Englishman's face.

The blood drained from the Captain's face as his body stiffened with fury. A crimson trickle ran down the corner of his mouth and he slowly wiped it away with the back of his hand, while his black eyes blazed with malice. Mr. Cruse grabbed the Spaniard from behind and thrust him against the wall, holding him there.

"Release him, Mr. Cruse." The voice came in a tight, strained tone. "Now, find out who has disobeyed my orders."

Sometime later the crew was gathered in angry groups. In the center, strung up between two pillars, a young man fearfully awaited the pleasure and wrath of his superior.

Captain Bartlett eyed the young insurgent, noting the belligerent attitude he adopted to overcome the distressing emotions revealed in the turbulent eyes. The Captain recognised the evidence of strong, stubborn English stock in the mein and the broad, bronzed back exposed for the cat's long caressing talons. The muscles across Cox's shoulders stood out like thick cordage, flexing and gnarling as he shifted his weight in an impudent manner.

"Excellent," the Captain thought, "perhaps if he can pluck up enough of that cavalier attitude he may be able to carry that bravado to the limit."

"I have warned you men time and again, torture for torture's sake will not be tolerated aboard this ship. When we seek vengeance, we do it honourably, not by binding a prisoner, leaving him with no ability to defend himself, as was done this day. I know many of you or your friends have been put to unbearable pain by the Spaniards—"

Angry mutterings met his ears as the crew voiced their malcontent among themselves. He waited until silence prevailed once more. "But on this ship we are English, not Spanish, and we are freemen; as such we will not lower ourselves to the level of our Spanish cousins."

Pausing, he turned a jaundiced eye to the bound man. "John Cox could have proven himself a member of His Majesty's society, but cast it aside to attempt revenge. For this disobedience to my law, he, as ringleader, will receive in the presence of the ship's company and prisoners twenty lashes and the rest of the trip home in the brig, chained with his conspirators."

As Jamie looked over his crew he could feel the undercurrent of discontent before it was uttered. "Are there any here who seek to disagree with me?" The dark piercing eyes swept the deck with the dare.

Immediately silence prevailed, but the tension mounted. Grim expressions met his glower. They voiced their protests silently with rigid backs and tightly clenched jaws. The Captain's hauteur matched his crew's. He silently cursed the awkward situation forced upon him and, raising his arm, signaled for the punishment to begin.

The cat fell and the seaman screamed as the divided tails stroked his bare flesh with a searing touch. The individual tips of the whip terminated in a tight knot which alerted every nerve with an agonising spasm. Blood seeped to the surface of each welt until his back was interlaced with crisscrossed ridges and a crimson flow.

Words of encouragement filled the air as the young man clamped his teeth tightly shut, allowing only slight moans to escape his lips. Jamie nodded approvingly, his scowl still darkening his face, then turning to his first mate gave silent instructions. Mr. Cruse disappeared to obey them.

The crew counted every blow. By the count of fifteen, the young seaman's head would rise with each stroke. A low grunt escaped with each blow, but that and the sound of the whip whistling through the air biting into the red, raw flesh was the only sound, except the number of the count.

Bartlett could see that Cox was now in a stupor and breathed a silent sigh of relief that there would be no more pain felt. His memories of the whip being laid upon his own back prickled at his mind and sent a tingle of pain through

him. Resentment surged anew as he observed the enemy enjoying the young man's torment.

On the count of twenty, two seamen struggled forward with buckets of brackish sea water and doused the lacerated back. Then willing comrades carried him below.

Captain Rodriguez's face held a smug look of satisfaction as he turned away.

"Don't go yet, Don Alfredo," came the cold, cutting voice of Captain Bartlett. "I believe we have some unfinished business ourselves." He approached the Spaniard with Mr. Cruse following, holding a large ornate and bejeweled box in front of him. The crew, which had begun to disperse, turned back in curiosity.

Jamie lifted the lid. Lying on thick, red velvet and nested in the soft crimson pockets lay two beautiful, hand crafted, dueling pistols. Embellished with the Damascus twist, steel barrels gleamed with a nigrescent coldness; an underlay of brass, deeply ornamented in a beautiful arabesque design and hand carved ivory handles gave the advocates of death a deceptive beauty.

The Spaniard frowned perplexed. "Since you struck the challenging blow, I believe I have the choice of weapons, the choice of time and the choice of sites. Of course, I chose here and now. I suggest you select your seconds and make your preparations."

"Wouldn't you rather choose a weapon and site closer to your station in life, Captain? Say, a knife in a dark alley?" The Spaniard asked haughtily, looking down his nose at the brigand.

The Englishman's face reverted to his cold, glaring scowl. "My station in life is none of your damned affair, sir, but if you are so concerned with it, suffice it to say that I am the son of an English Lord and see if that makes it any easier to pull the trigger or to receive a bullet in your gut!"

With a look of disdain, the Spaniard chose his weapon and moved off, inspecting it. The two antagonists stood on marked off lines with their backs to one another while Mr.

Cruse counted to three. As he barked the final number, the Spanish captain whirled around, aimed the pistol hastily and fired. As the shot broke the silence, blood spurted from the right side of the Hawk's captain. His body jerked at the blow but the extended arm holding the pistol never wavered from its target. Don Alfredo Rodriquez stood stiffly at attention. The pistol dangled at his side as he defiantly faced the certain death to follow. Seconds passed and the unfaltering pistol still held its target. Sweat raised in dribblets on Don Alfredo's forehead and trickled down his face like tears. His now wavering eye sought first one then the other of the dark twin orbs of hatred, and could arrive at no conclusion as to which carried the final decision in his dilemma.

Suddenly the Englishman pointed the pistol to one side and fired. "Your men will need you once we put you ashore, Captain, but the next time we meet... Now, if you will excuse me." He turned, waving away Mr. Cruse's offered help and descended below.

Billy met him just outside the cabin and Jamie collapsed against his friend. From under his arm and downward the crimson flow ran freely.

"Make sure Katy is in the bedchamber," Jamie whispered.

"She is, Capt'n."

"Help me, then. Do not let her see me until you have me cleaned up."

Billy helped him to the lounge and stripped the bloody clothes from him, using the stained shirt to staunch the flow. The ball had seared him on the right side below the armpit. The profusion of blood proved, on cleaning, to be but a flesh wound.

Mr. Cruse entered the room. "Is the Captain all right?"

"He seems to be; jist a bloody mess it appears t' me. Go get Josiah."

When the first mate returned, Denton was behind him and took over the care of the captain.

Katy could hear the men's voices in Jamie's cabin. Putting aside her sewing she opened the door. Her hand went to her

throat and she could feel the blood rushing from her head.

"Jamie," she screamed.

Billy caught the frightened woman in her rush to her husband's side, with reassurance that the situation wasn't nearly as bad as it appeared, led her gently back into her room. Seating her on the gallery seat he told her what had happened.

"But all of the blood..."

"Josiah said it's naught but a flesh wound. There's no danger to himself, the ball just took a little chunk out of him, nothin' serious, mum."

"You are certain, Billy?" She clutched at his shirt front pleadingly.

"Would I lie to ye, m'lady, about the Captain?"

Josiah packed the wound and bound it tightly, running the linen strips around Jamie's chest and across his shoulder. The wounded man frowned at the restriction put upon his movements. Trying to move, he watched the room tilt and sway and fell back against the couch weakly.

"From all that blood I followed down the companion-way," Josiah remarked with a wry grin, "I think, Captain, if you will have a good jolt of this fine stock of brandy you keep on hand and see to your wife we will all feel better," he said holding a draught of the prescribed tonic out to the wounded man.

"You may make a good doctor yet, Denton." The Captain grinned weakly, lifting the cup upward in a salute. The liquor burned as it trickled down his throat. A warmth spread out as a glow enveloped him; after the next sip his eye lids grew heavy and the glow crept slowly through him. His strength fled before the invader and when Katy reached his side the cup had dropped from the lax fingers and he was asleep.

She sunk to her knees and kissed him gently, then with soothing fingers pushed the persistent lock of hair back from his forehead. The three men tiptoed from the room.

The next day found the captain back on his feet and in command. Katy was surprised at his amazing ability to

recuperate so quickly. Jamie hastened to assure her there were no after effects of the bloodletting and but a soreness around the wound. When she had tried to reason with him about staying in bed, he told her there was no time. His ship was as a demanding woman, always needing attention. With the prisoners aboard it was necessary that his hand be the commanding one. The captured Spanish ship had been given a crew and was even now on its way to Virginia. Everyone was necessary, for the crew of the Hawk was short-handed.

They approached the lush jungle coast of Santa Domingo cautiously and found a small bay. The captives were taken to shore in the small dinghies under heavy guard. They were left with a week's supply of food and medical supplies.

As the last boat pulled away from the shore, Captain Rodriquez shook his fist and yelled at the crew, "Tell your Captain we will meet again and when we do he will be sorry he didn't kill me when he had the chance."

"I'm sorry already," one of the tars muttered. "We shoulda killed the whole damned bunch of 'em. Given the chance, 'tis no more than they'da done ter us."

"Aye, who'da ever thought the Capt'n woulda let a bunch o' Dons go, the way he hates 'em?"

"'Tis that little lady o' his."

"Aye. Who'da ever thought a little piece o' fluff like her coulda tethered the Hawk?"

Even before the company of rowing men were aboard, the crew of the Hawk was rushing around on deck and scurrying up the taut lines. Suddenly the sails filled with the wind and puffed up, taking on the shape of great feathery clouds. The island and its new inhabitants quickly faded into the distance and were as quickly forgotten.

The days ahead were filled with indigo skies and white cumulus clouds which hung suspended like inflated cotton balls, some with tiny wisps of tails traveling behind like afterthoughts.

Katy lay on her soft downy pallet under the flapping

canopy watching the multi-shaped clouds float slowly by. It was with ease she could imagine all kinds of different figurations taking place as the winds whispered silent instructions in their unseen ears. She grew drowsy with the gentle rising and falling of the ship. The book she was reading slowly lowered as the tropical sun spread its warming rays around her. The canopy waved and snapped in a monotonous rhythm. In the background could be heard the crew going about their duties. Her eyelids laden with a torpid drowsiness lowered and opened slowly, then slowly lowered once more.

Of the whole trip now was the most boring for Katy. She had kept herself busy mending Jamie's clothes with the loving care of a new bride and making all those tiny garments needed for the baby. Many hours had been consumed embroidering elaborate designs on the shirts and gowns of their expected son. As she had cut and stitched the material she had bought in Jamaica for the child, she tried again to visualize a miniature Jamie. She opened her eyes with effort and looked at her skirt. Even lying down she was inclined to bulge in front. Feeling the familiar touch of his mother's hand, the child stirred restlessly. She smiled lazily at the sharp thrusts against her womb; longing rose within her to hold the small one and cuddle him against her breast. Four months was just too long to wait.

Her mind raced ahead to her new life in the New World. Fortune's Fancy, she repeated the name again. What did her new home hold for her? Love? Of course, she mused, where Jamie was she would always find love. Happiness? She would be content wherever she was with him by her side. Fulfillment? Thinking of the one person who was responsible for making her feel complete caused her breath to catch in her throat. He rose before her inner vision as the Jamie she had once prayed for.

Watching him at the rail, she noted the dark, lean, hardness of his deep-thewed body and arms, the handsome boldness of features and glint of ebony eyes filled her vision

and heart. White teeth flashed against the bronze visage in a boyish way. Her heart swelled and felt as if it might burst from the fullness contained therein. Her chest ached from the over abundance of feelings released inside her. His eyes consumed her, leaving her weak and trembling. She sighed contentedly.

Fulfillment? Aye. With Jamie beside her, ever would she know the completeness of joy.

She wondered what Fortune's Fancy was like. Primitive? By all means; did not the savage rule the backwoods of the Tidewaters with their uncivilized ways? But she knew no fear, for she also knew the security of Jamie's love and his untamed possessiveness—what was his would be protected with the final breath or drop of blood. Bardagne was final proof of that sure knowledge. She felt secure in all ways save one. What of her mother-in-law? No, she pushed that thought into the recesses of her mind, refusing to dwell upon the unknown. Instead, she thought about the task of preparing for the arrival of the baby. Jamie had talked about refurbishing a small room off the master bedroom, and she set her mind to that plan. But once more her thoughts were unwillingly filled with Lady Bartlett. For some reason which she could not fathom Katy knew she feared the woman. She hoped they could be friends, but deep in her heart she knew there would be no friendship between them, only suspicion, jealousy and hate.

What manner of woman could not distinguish between husband and son? How would Jamie respond to the strained relationship between wife and mother? She had no doubt as to her own jealous feelings, for they had manifested themselves aboard the Hawk with the crew. Every moment Jamie spent with the men was resented; how could she ever endure a possessive mother?

Sitting up, she lay folded arms across drawn knees, lowering her chin upon them and looked out into the vast empty ocean. The infinite of the blue-green world was overpowering. She shivered from the hollow emptiness of

the surrounding boundless watery space; land, she knew, was miles behind and ahead of them; she felt like a small dot of hopelessness floating in a world of vastness. Her whole being suddenly filled with terror at the immensity surrounding her. The terror enveloped her in a blanket of ice, yet she felt drenched in wetness, then it too turned icy.

"Is this a private gathering or can anyone attend?" he knelt down on one knee, grinning at her.

"Oh, Jamie, hold me," she cried.

Bemused, he gathered her into his arms and held her tightly, surprised at her trembling, for it had not been apparent while he had stood watching her.

"Katy, what is the matter? What has frightened you?"

"I am so afraid."

"Of what, darling?"

She just shook her head and continued trembling.

"Let's go below," he suggested softly. Picking her up, he carried his overwrought wife below to the cabin. He laid her gently in bed and sat beside her.

"Now, what is this nonsense?"

With tears streaming down her face, she turned from him.

"Katy, for heaven's sake, tell me what it is that is troubling you and maybe I can help."

"I don't—know," she wailed between sobs. "I'm just—afraid."

"Of what!" he demanded. He had always felt inadequate around crying women and resented the awkward position in which they put him with their illogical tears of sorrow and wails of woe.

Katy felt so alone at that moment; whither had fled her safe and secure world of moments ago? How do you explain to your husband that you are afraid of his world and the unknown enigmas it raises, she asked herself?

"Of the baby, the trip, the uncertainty—oh, just of everything!"

His lips met her own gently, "There is nothing to be afraid

of, darling. I am here and I will always be here. There is no way you can be free of me now. And there is nothing that can harm you while I am around."

"I know I am being foolish. I don't know how to explain it. I just felt so alone and frightened up there without you."

"The ocean does that to people unused to its vastness sometimes. But you must remember, you are not alone anymore, Katy. You have me and soon you will have my son." He laid his hand on her stomach and both felt the thrust of knee or elbow in sharp protest at the unwarranted disturbance of a quiet rest.

Jamie could not explain the elated feeling which filled him whenever he touched her and could feel the response from within. It made him feel superior to everyone around him to know that he had helped to create a living thing. As far as he knew, no other woman he had possessed had conceived and at times it had bothered him, but he would arrogantly pass it off, trying to convince himself it was for the best because of his own position in life. He had wanted no bastards left behind him to feel the barbs and taunts of uncouth bores, as he had when younger. As far as he knew none of his seed heretofore cast carelessly hither and yon had borne fruit. That this beautiful creature whom he adored was his wife and would soon bear him a son was almost more than he could envision. Much ado had been made by his parents, especially his mother, on carrying on the family line; but he had given the advice little thought in his overwhelming desire for power and wealth. He smiled inwardly; now his thoughts turned often towards creating a clan of his own—a very large clan. He thanked whatever stars or fortune that had made the chance encounter possible for she was all that he had ever wanted in life and found wanting—and more. His whole conception of the love relationship between man and woman tottered on the brim of collapse. He still believed that man was the master and controlled all that he owned, but he could now temper that control with love and sometimes under-

standing, even to the point of seeing her view of the situation. Nevertheless, at all times he would be the controller and she appeared to understand and accept this estate.

She lay quiet.

"Are you feeling better now?"

She nodded, her emerald eyes glistening through the dewiness clinging to the thick, sooty lashes. Smiling at him, she raised her arms and he enfolded her tightly. Their lips met and the smoldering ember within flamed; he held her away reluctantly.

"Careful, my little witch," he warned her huskily.

"Do I still fill you with desire as ugly and swollen as I am?"

"You grow more desirable every day. Life seems to spring from you now. You are more beautiful than ever. Is it always so with pregnant women? Or is it because what you carry beneath your heart is mine?" Once more he touched her and felt the joy surge through him at the movement under his hand.

Katy's pulses still churned like the undulating turbulence of a flash flood from his touch and kiss. She had drunk deeply of the refreshing dew of his mouth as a thirsting traveler at a deep, cooling well; and had welcomed the sheltering bliss of his steely embrace which warded off the buffetings of the unknown. Now all qualms had been laid to rest and she observed him with more than a warm regard. She studied him with mixed emotions. She felt his love for her was sure as was hers for him, although she felt that she might never be able to fully understand this complicated person whom she called husband. As now, he could be tender and gentle, but also as harsh and cruel as the times in which they lived. She knew that she would receive all that that love had to offer: protection, shelter, comfort and a warm, loving heart, all of the things she had always desired. But she also knew she must recognize his darker side, the one that was in command most of the time, for it had been born and bred into him. He was master and lord over all that he owned. She must never fail to be aware of this fact, though it

touched her personally less and less now that he knew about the baby. He was a compulsive man and when he wanted something it was required immediately. He was in his own way insensitive, but she closed her eyes to his failings, her love revealing only his virtues. He was still suspicious of women and probably would never get over the scars that had been left by the women he had cared for most. But didn't love conquer all things, she mused. Even now after their love had been sealed by marriage, his words would at times still sting, but she had learned to overlook the pain because she knew he loved her, she forgave because it was his nature to say and do the things he did. Didn't love heal all wounds? came from her heart. For once her mind answered nothing for it too was in a loving repose. Now as she watched the tenderness cross his face she could forget his other side. This James Bartlett alone was the one she saw.

He slapped his thigh and rose. "Well, to work. We reach the Tidewaters of Virginia in three days—and home." He bent and kissed her hurriedly and left.

Home!—and Lady Bartlett! Once more apprehension touched her.

Part Three
VIRGINIA

Chapter 12

Katy stood at the rail searching the still, barren sky. Not even a wisp of downy white marred the continuous expanse of the azure dome. Even the water appeared to take on the same colour and serenity of the heavens. Enwrapped in this beautiful, blue world a calmness enveloped her, filling her with a fullness of peace and harmony.

Suddenly, above her head a loud piercing shriek severed the meditative mood, frightening her momentarily. Her eyes jerked upwards to see a snow-white bird with a hooked beak brazenly swooping toward her. With a cry of alarm she turned to flee. The bird floated peacefully to the deck and looked at her curiously as if wondering why anyone should fear him. Katy heaved a sigh of relief at the familiar harbinger of land.

"My goodness, you silly bird, you nearly frightened me to death with all that unnecessary noise." She scolded the inquisitive seagull. "Where are the rest of your friends?"

Surely you are not flying around out there all alone, are you?"

The bird turned its head to one side as if listening attentively. Katy laughed softly, then turned her eyes to search the blue firmament. As if in answer to her inquiry a dozen or more of the gull's relatives dotted the sky, darting and diving and screeching their welcoming cry to the weary travelers.

"There are your heralders of home, mates; ten pounds sterling to the first man who sights the shores of Virginia!" Jamie called from behind her.

Virginia! Home! Katy's heart soared—first with anticipation of a new home and a new beginning and then with trepidation. In that direction also dwelt a new mother-in-law.

Even the babe was elated, for he kicked and thrust against the wall of his warm, moist world.

"You feel it also, don't you, my son? Yes, our new home is out there; soon a whole, new life will begin for both of us. As long as we have your father beside us it can be nothing short of perfection. We will work, you and I, to obtain the goodwill of your grandmother," she whispered.

Katy watched the crew as they went about their labours. With one eye on their tasks, they cast long glances westward or in their eagerness climbed upon the railing or yardarm to get a better look. Ten pounds sterling could keep a sailor's blood warm for several nights. The promise of loving arms and a companionable tankard of ale had been a tantalising fantasy of dreams and whispered conversations in their close quarters ever since the young lass had come aboard. Their only reprieve had been at Jamaica, and that hadn't lasted long enough to suit the younger bucks. But once at Hawk's Lair...

"All right, all right, get ye back ter work!" Mr. Cruse yelled. "Quit yer lollygaggin' around. Pity that it is, the Hawk don't run herself."

"Land ho! Capt'n, there she is—Virginia!"

Jamie's glass was at his eye immediately. In the distance he could barely make out the uneven outline of the distant shore enshrouded by a purple haze.

"Mr. Cruse, mark John Roue down for ten pounds of the King's sterling to be added to his share. You have the eyes of an eagle, sir."

"Nay, Capt'n, a great longin' fer home and a chance t' put me feet upon solid earth told me when and where ter make my cry. In truth, sir, I see no more than the rest do."

Jamie noted the agreement in the eyes of each. He turned his face toward the sea so his own emotions would not be displayed so openly. He knew the way they must feel for the first time. True, he had always been glad to return to Fortune's Fancy, but that was because of the fierce sense of pride that possessed him when he topped the knoll and looked down upon his small realm. Now there was a difference—and that difference was the petite, lovely creature standing at the gunwale straining to see the alien land beyond her vision.

Katy was so intent upon the quest to see the land called Virginia that she was unaware of Jamie standing behind her until she heard him chuckle. She looked over her shoulder questioningly.

He patted her belly, "If it were not for the bulge you so brazenly display, my sweet, you could get several inches closer and see about the same distance further."

She giggled, "It does hinder me at times, my love."

He offered her the glass. "Here, try this and see if it helps."

Katy looked through the long narrow tube, but could see nothing clearly.

"Turn this ring slowly."

She followed his instructions and suddenly a long, dark, rugged tract of land leapt before her sight. She turned wondering eyes to Jamie.

"But you really can't—see that it's land. It's just—dark. How did he know?"

"I believe it is called homesickness, my love. His wife,

children and all that he holds dear are there. I suppose, in a way, part of John Roue is there also."

Standing behind her, he slipped his arms around her waist and rested his hands upon his moving son. Katy smiled up at him, her eyes shining with happiness, then their eyes sought the sea again. They stood quietly for several long moments savoring the nearness of love and contentment.

"We should be seeing land anytime now. It will be good to get back, there is much to be done. The harvesting of the cotton and tobacco will soon be upon us. Also I am most anxious for you to see the plantation. I hope you will like it."

"Wherever you are, my love, is home and I will love it."

His arm tightened in a squeeze as he grinned at her with that boyish grin she loved so much, which was becoming more familiar every day.

"Land ho!" came the cry and soon many voices took up the chant.

As the ship skimmed across the waters Katy could indeed see land. It lay emerald-green beneath the blue and white of the sky. All that morning they traveled along the shore line. Stretching for miles, the beautiful virgin white sand glistened in the golden sun. Shrieking sea gulls continued their ear-splitting cries. A heron stood on a long, spindly leg eyeing them sleepily. Standing at the edge of the forest in all his regal beauty, a great stag cautiously watched the homeward bound travelers. Many varieties of trees heavily dotted the landscape. Jamie pointed out oak, elm, spruce, ash, maple and many more. She knew by the tremor in his voice that he loved this beautiful land.

Up ahead a blue-grey mist arose from the mouth of a bay.

"The James River," Jamie informed her. "The first settlers built just a short way inside the bay. There is a small peninsula where they first settled. Named in honour of King James, not myself," he teased. Then turned his face toward the inlet and viewed it soberly, "They had a hard time establishing James Towne. Between the Indians and the people fighting amongst themselves, I am surprised they

have done as well as they have. In fact, they just had a rebellion in '76. Most of the town was destroyed before the rebellion was put down by the governor, Sir William Berkley. They are still working to restore it."

"Do you live near James Towne?"

"No. Quite a way up the river. But we buy some of our supplies there. At least, the ones I neglect to bring back with me. I am afraid I have no head for shopping. I usually let Billy handle that part. With his Scotch background he is very good at bargaining. I sent him out window shopping one day for me and look what a beautiful bargain he brought back." He grinned.

Katy was fascinated with the miracle of this new land. While traveling up the river the forest became so dense it took on a purple cast in the distance. The emerald giants reflected their images in the murky waters. The trees grew down to the rim of the river seeming to grasp the black, sandy soil in a death grip, holding on to the fertile earth tightly. The forests were so heavily overgrown that dark entanglements clutched at each other as if to forbid any to enter.

The soil was a rich, loamy mould in some places, in others, a slimy looking clay or a barren, grey gravel. Later she would learn it was also red, appearing at a distance to be drenched in blood.

All along the river were many meadows that ran for acres, overgrown with trees and weeds and the most green, luxuriant grass she had ever seen. A deer walked through one of the leas belly deep in the dense green.

"The land is beautiful and untouched by man. Just as God first created it," she thought.

"See the fish. There—there is one lying in those weeds!" Jamie pointed excitedly. "They are abundant in this river. Especially here where the tides carry food in to them."

As they entered the bay, Katy had seen that it was a narrow inlet, because of the small islands found there. They were covered with marsh weeds and grass. Many had

different kinds of trees making them a virtual forest. For as far as she could see, there were many of these small islets intermingling with the murky aqua waters.

Beautiful birds of many different colours flew from tree to tree, singing, chirping and twittering; their beautiful concert thrilling Katy as no other music had ever done. The tree branches were so closely woven together that the birds had built great hanging nests from the thick limbs. Everywhere she looked butterflies darted through the tranquil countryside, their riotous colours flashing as their wings opened and closed in flight. Through the thick jungle-like growth the sun beamed down reflecting a brilliant scarlet, carmine and gold from the waters.

"Jamie, it's lovely. I never dreamed a land could be so beautiful."

"I was hoping you would find it so. Until I found you, Virginia was the favourite woman in my life." His hand covered hers on the railing. Love filled eyes met his and a deep contentment enveloped Katy.

"I have some business with Mr. Cruse. We won't arrive in James Towne until later in the afternoon. Maybe you had better rest for awhile."

She wanted to stay and watch this strange, beautiful country, but saw the stubborn set of his jaw and knew arguing was useless. She knew he was correct, she should rest as even now she could feel weariness creeping through her like a slinking, thievish mist, sapping her strength. She turned once more to the awe-inspiring countryside, then sighed and went below to seek her rest.

Later in the afternoon she rejoined Jamie on the quarter-deck.

"Are we going to stop in James Towne?"

"No, there is no need. I am anxious to get home and if we did stop we would have to pay our respects to Governor Berkley, Lord Dunlop, Sir Amesley and a half dozen other Sirs and Lords and, frankly, I can do without that. There is

an island not too far up the river and it has a very convenient bay. We usually put in there for the night."

"How far are we from—from home?"

If he noticed the slight hesitation in her voice, he chose to ignore it. "We will be there the day after tomorrow. We can not make very good time on the James because of these damnable isles. As you can see, they are everywhere. I have no doubt Tim Oakey could navigate this river blindfolded; he has told me so enough times, but I'll not let him try it in my ship."

That night after dining she and Jamie reclined on her pallet under the canopy, enjoying the sounds of the wilderness. Katy lay against his chest contentedly listening to the chirping chorus of the crickets and the baritone serenade of the frogs. Jamie pointed to a doe with her young, a spotted faun on long, unsteady legs, cautiously approaching the water from the thick brush. Katy had never seen a deer that closely. There had been many running loose on Lord Carstairs' estate, but they had been too wild to approach.

"Aren't they beautiful? Jamie, look at the little one, how sweet," she whispered.

The doe's ears shot up as the whispered words carried the short distance on the silent evening breeze. The doe hesitated. The faun immediately froze, as if given a silent warning. The female looked at Katy, her soft, brown eyes large and staring. Sensing no danger to herself or her babe, she gingerly stepped to the water. Lowering her nose, she drank quickly, then jerked her head upright abruptly, senses alert to any danger. Her watchful eyes surveyed the silent and tranquil meadow before turning to the faun. The doe stood guard while the faun quenched his thirst. With a graceful turn of her head she looked at Katy again, then the two silently glided into the deep forest from whence they had come.

It was so peaceful Katy hated to move, but as the night grew darker, the mosquitoes grew bolder. They set up a

virtual aria, darting in and out, stinging and droning their humming lyrics.

Jamie gave one vicious slap on his jaw and stood up. "Well, that is all the blood they are going to get from me tonight, I am going below." He held out his hand to her and she grasped it eagerly. It was getting harder to get up quickly now.

"Jamie, what are all those strange, little lights I see? Are they glowworms?" she asked delightedly.

He laughed. "Those are the same little bugs as you see in England, only here the Indians call them fireflies. When we get home I shall catch you some. But for the moment, madam, I suggest we retire before these other bugs consume us where we stand."

As they walked down the companion way Billy was coming toward them. Katy flashed him a smile which he returned eagerly.

"Billy, bring some brandy and come and join us," the Captain invited.

"Aye, sir."

As they entered the cabin Katy looked over her shoulder at Jamie, "I think Billy's avoiding me. I hardly see him any more."

"I have been giving him some extra duties. He complains of being trapped below too much with nothing to do. Seems I have someone else to look after my needs now."

Katy frowned in irritation as she sat down on the gold lounge, then leaning back, sighed loudly.

"Tired?" he asked softly, standing over her.

"A little. By the time he gets here I shan't be able to walk if I get much bigger." She patted her stomach.

"I will carry you," he teased, laughingly.

"You won't be able to lift me, let alone carry me." She returned with a sharpness in her voice he had never heard before.

"Does it bother you that I tease you about your

condition?" he asked going down on one knee before her and taking her hand in his. "For you know, in reality you barely show. It just seems so to you."

"What *bothers* me, m'lord, is that I am beginning to hate my condition."

In her anger, she failed to notice the facial change at the hated title, but with an inward effort he forced the nettling impatience aside.

"What *bothers* me, is that you no longer hold me or touch me. Have I become so undesirable to you?"

"Don't you know that I want to hold you and touch you? I want you so much that sometimes I feel like—" He took a deep breath and rose, moving away from her. "Would you condone rape again, madam?" he asked bitterly.

"The burning I feel when I am near you must surely be what hell is like." His voice was husky with emotion. "I never knew five months was so long."

"You should try nine," she told him sharply.

"I have tried to make it easier on both of us."

"How? By sleeping here or on deck? I need to be able to reach out and touch you and know that you are near. I want to feel your arms around me when I'm lonely or afraid." Tears welled in her eyes and spilled over onto her pale cheeks. "I told you Lucinda gave me the medicine to protect the baby. Each day he grows stronger and so do I."

"Katy, you know what happened the last time."

"Yes, but surely God didn't mean for a man and woman to be apart at a time like this. We should be able to be together day or night."

"I suppose so, if I were—different—stronger than I am. You know that I want you, but I don't want to hurt you in that wanting."

"But you are hurting me! Touch me, Jamie, kiss me. For God's sake, let me know that you love me!" she cried in anguish.

He grabbed her elbows and brought her roughly to her

feet. His mouth eagerly sought hers as of old, with all the passion and fire he possessed. She felt the old feelings returning and clung to him weakly.

When he drew away from her his breath was laboured and she could feel his hands trembling on her shoulders. "Now, in the name of your God, madam, what do we do?"

"Since when have I ever had to give you instructions, my love?" she whispered.

He swung her up into ardent arms and carried her into the bedchamber. A slight knock sounded on the outer door.

"Go away, Billy," he called. To her ears alone he said, "Tonight I intend to get drunk on love."

She slept late that last morning she would spend aboard the Hawk. Jamie had left at daybreak and the ship had long been under way. Stretching she watched the beautiful, green world pass by through the window. She considered lying in bed longer, she felt so indolent, but as sleep retreated she remembered what the new day would bring. Jamie had told her they would reach Fortune's Fancy in the early afternoon. She felt a shiver of anticipation chill her.

"If only this day were behind me." Katy thought desperately.

She was still searching through her clothes when Jamie entered. "Get up, sleepy head—" His cheerful words died on his lips as he surveyed the cluttered room. "Great heavens, woman, what in the world is going on in here?"

Clothes were strewn everywhere and Katy was sitting sadly in the midst of them. She struggled to get up. He waded through the discarded wardrobe to help her to her feet.

"Come on, my little butter ball," he chuckled.

"Jamie, what am I going to wear?" she wailed.

"You are not going to try to tell me that you have nothing to wear with all of this, are you?" He motioned to the clothes scattered across the room.

"But look at me. I can't get into any of the pretty ones."

"Katy, don't make such a big fuss over it."

"That's easy for you to say, but I want your mother to like me."

"Until you have met her, Katy, do not worry so much about it. Let us see what kind of spirits she is in first." He drew her to the bed and sat down, pulling her onto his lap.

"I know I should have told you about her a long time ago, but—" He shrugged uneasily. "When we get home, I should go on ahead and prepare her and let Billy bring you in the carriage. It would be more comfortable for you and it would give me the time I need with her."

"Will she hate me so much, Jamie?"

"I don't know about her hating you. She may resent you at first." He set her aside and commenced pacing. "Damn!" Sometimes women are such a nuisance. If the Creator only knew what trouble they can be, He might have changed His mind." The dark scowl settled across his face.

"How can I tell you about mother?" He shook his head and his long mane waved freely. "I love her, Katy, not only because she is my mother but because of all the pain and agony she has had to endure, both of mind and body. But, in reality, she is two people. Mother is a warm and loving individual, but Lady Valentine Bartlett is a shrew—cold, haughty, and completely unpredictable. I don't know how I can love and hate at the same time, but I do. It is just according to the person inhabiting the body at the time." He looked at her through his masked, unreadable eyes. "She has a house of her own and stays there most of the time. I will try to see that your meetings are few and amiable. Other than that, I can promise you nothing." He walked to the door and then turned. "Wear the dress in which you charmed Sir Henry and Lizzie."

As the door closed dread settled around Katy like a shroud.

She stood at the rail and unconsciously rubbed the smooth, rounded beam feeling the strength and stability of the thick wood. To all who noticed her she was a calm,

poised, beautiful woman. The Lincoln-green silk dress enhanced her beauty and magnified the greenness of her eyes and the copper sheen of her hair. A delicate, lace scarf was skillfully tucked into the revealing bodice, hiding the milk-white shoulders and bosom. Her hair was pulled severely to the nape of her neck and braided, then wound around the back of her head.

She had hoped the full skirt would continue to conceal her swelling belly, but as she had twisted and turned in front of the mirror, she knew that that was impossible.

Her heart was racing madly and her stomach felt as if there were hundreds of fluttering butterflies seeking a way out.

Seeing Jamie watching her from the quarterdeck, she moved to go to him. He turned his back to her and walked away. Katy stopped in stunned surprise. She felt shaken and confused, for she knew that the spurn was deliberate. Crushed and rejected, she stared into the murky waters feeling as if she were viewing her own future.

"Don't be feelin' badly agin him, mum. He's always as tight as a bowstring till he be meeting with herself."

"Oh, Billy, how can one woman cause so much heartache, even in her absence?"

"I told ye she be not right in the head. Ye never know where ye stand with 'er until ye're in 'er presence, and even then I'm not always sure."

They stood together watching the green, lush forests and meadows fall away and melt into more of the same beauty. The birds warbled a lovely melody, their singing blending into a melifluous serenade. The colourful array of butterflies seemed to dance and leap to the trilling music as if they were performing a ballet. Katy became enchanted with the beauty surrounding her and the apprehension written on her face was replaced by the lilt of her smile.

"Billy, it's almost like living in a fairy world. I never knew such beauty existed."

"Aye, mum. It's a beautiful country, one yer eyes never git tired of."

The ship turned west into the mouth of a different channel. An invisible line seemed to hold the muddy waters back as they entered into an almost clear blue stream.

"Swift Creek," Billy explained. "Another two hours and we'll enter Hopewell Bay and then ye'll see a sight ter behold." His voice lowered with a husky tremor.

Katy looked at him and smiled wistfully. "Home?"

"Aye," he whispered, "home."

Swift Creek was more than a mere appendage of the James River, it was a repetition. The lush, green isles and the grey, barren gravel and sand bars continued to hinder their way. Many times Katy could hear the hull of the Hawk scrape across a shallow sandy bottom. A seaman was constantly throwing the heavy lead line into the water and calling out the depth of the water beneath them. Katy watched the shallow bottom glide by slowly.

The river banks still boasted of the deep green foliage and an abundance of colourful, wild flowers and wild life. The surrounding beauty enchanted Katy and for the first time in her life she felt entirely free. She knew if she spread her arms she could soar as the eagle had that Billy had shown her earlier. Looking up at the Bartlett banner, she watched the hawk rise and fall in the breeze as if straining to be free. She thought she understood how that greedy predator felt. No creature should be earth bound when there was so much beauty to see.

She lay down on the pallet to rest, for she suddenly felt tired, as if all strength had been drained from her body.

"If only this day were over," she whispered. Every nerve and muscle seemed taut with apprehension, yet weak.

While immersed in the new sights which surrounded her, she had been relaxed, but almost at once after lying down the fears and frustrations had returned in a flood.

"If only Jamie would come and reassure me," she thought. In his preoccupation with the ship, he appeared to ignore her.

Soon she fell into a restless slumber, yet could hear all the sounds surrounding her. Soon excited voices brought her out of the uneasy stupor and she struggled to her feet. The vessel had emerged into Hopewell Bay. It was like an over-sized bowl, stretching out in the distance. She breathed slowly, absorbing the grandiose sight which greeted her astonished eyes and her heart beat faster for she knew she had reached her final destination.

The Hawk approached the bay from the south and to the north lay the wharf of Fortune's Fancy. Westward the bay received the slow, tranquil waters of Mill Creek, where one of Jamie's indentured families ran a lumber mill beside the slow moving waters. To the east, Cooper's Creek emptied into the large bowl. Straight ahead the long, wharf jutted out into the bay and the Spanish carrack was anchored below the wharf on a sandy beach.

The shore had been stripped of almost all of the trees and foliage, but the land beyond was covered as far as she could see with lush meadows. In the far distance were several buildings, but the distance made it impossible to tell what manner of structure they were.

To the west of the basin she could see a great barn and a small cabin. Billy came up beside her.

"Is that where we will live?"

He chuckled. "Nay, mum, that be one of the tobacco farms and is Black Sam's house, he be the overseer there."

"Is he a slave?"

"Aye."

"He lives out there by himself?"

"With his family. See those cabins over there?" She nodded. "That's one bunch of cabins for the slaves that Sam works on this farm."

"Don't they run away?"

"Where would they go?" he asked indifferently. "There's nothin' but wilderness fer miles and savages." He pointed, "Over to the east is another tobacco farm. A black by the name of Eli is overseer there. You can't see his house nor the cabins from here."

"The farms look bigger than Lord Percy's estates," Katy breathed in amazement.

"Black Sam's acreage is about eight thousand acres. 'Course not all of it be in crops; some day the Capt'n hopes fer all of it ter produce. Eli takes care of only about six thousand acres. There be another tobacco farm and two cotton farms ye can't see that stands behind the main house. All in all about twenty thousand acres, I guess."

Her eyes grew wide in wonderment. She never dreamed Jamie was so wealthy. Amelia certainly hadn't been very clever when she had cast him aside as a lowly Virginia farmer.

"He owns all this?" she asked dumbfounded.

"Well, not exactly. Lord Thomas owns six thousand acres, that's the other tobacco farm I told ye of. Jamie sees ter it and get a commission fer takin' care of it. But the rest be the Capt'n's. He added the acres little by little from his days with Sir Henry. That's the only reason he turned buccaneer. He had t' prove t' hisself and everyone else that a bastard son kin do as well or better than a natural son. Some of the land belonged to the original grant of Fortune's Fancy. That be another bone to pick over betwixt him and his father."

The wharf jutted out into the basin. The large shafts of the huge pier had been driven deeply into the sandy bottom. The floor of the large dock was built of trees hewn in half. As near as Katy could guess, it was probably two rods in width. Long sheds lined one side in which the cotton and tobacco were stored.

As the Hawk drew up to the huge dock, many slaves appeared. Great smiles lighted up their faces, they danced and called to the crew in their excitement. Katy saw one

bound onto the back of a great bay stallion and race toward the plantation to tell everyone the news. She saw Jamie leap ashore and move among his people smiling, clasping their hands and laughing with them. She could sense the love they had for him and that the affection was returned.

He was giving instructions and warm regards to two Negroes who drew Katy's attention. They were both as tall as Jamie but probably out-weighed him by thirty or forty pounds, all muscle. They were dressed only in white cotton pants cut off at the knees. Their ebony skin glistened in the bright sun as if they had been oiled; huge deltoid muscles stood out like melons. Their biceps looked twice as large as their master's; Katy was stunned at the physical perfection of the blacks.

One of them felt her staring and turned, boldly looking her in the eyes. His features were unlike any Negro she had seen; the face was long and narrow with bold cheek bones and a thin arrogant nose. The dark eyes were wide, as a child's might be if caught with his fingers dripping in honey, yet the bold look given her was not the innocent look of a child. Katy felt as if she couldn't pull her eyes away from his brazen stare; then suddenly he smiled.

Katy blushed, but continued to watch him curiously. Jamie's head jerked toward her. She saw the dark mask descend over his face and he uttered a harsh word at the grinning black man, who turned to his master obediently. Yet before Katy turned away, she saw him furtively sneak another glance at her.

Billy came up to her side at that moment.

"That nigger's goin' t' get hisself kilt yet," he told her in a tight voice.

"Who are they?"

"Beulah's twin sons, Apollo and Adam. The friendly one is Apollo. Stay away from him. He's dangerous around women, black 'r white. Fancy's hisself with great importance, he do. Once found a white indentured girl floatin' in the crick. Some seemed t' think it was Apollo's doin's. The

planters kill the blacks fer matin' with white wimmin. Even the floggin's he's gotten ain't changed 'im a bit that I kin see. I keep tellin' the Capt'n that eager buck's goin' ter cause 'im alotta grief, but he and Adam are the plantation's studs and the Capt'n hates t' part with 'im."

"Plantation studs? What do you mean?"

"Well—they're—" he paused embarrassed. "Like a stallion, mum."

"Like an animal?" she exclaimed in disbelief.

His face and ears were tinged crimson and he refused to look at her.

"Well—I—I guess so. But they don't mind it, mum," he hurriedly assured her. "In fact, they're proud of the prestige it gives 'em."

They watched the activity and excitement in silence. Apollo caught Katy's eye whenever possible. He carried the largest loads and did everything he could to attract the master's beautiful young bride's attention, showing off like a little boy.

Jamie came up behind Katy and watched silently as the black continued to display his great strength and perfect physique to her. Katy was shocked by the information concerning the two blacks which Billy had revealed to her, yet she could hardly keep her eyes off of one or the other of them.

"Turn away from him, Katy!" Jamie's voice came from behind her in a quiet, yet cold tone. "You will not encourage him by word or glance. You are my wife, remember that and conduct yourself accordingly."

"Jamie, I don't know what you mean," she cried turning to him. "I've not encouraged him in any way that I'm aware of."

"He's a Negro slave, nothing more. You will have to learn our ways here. Whites are not friendly with the blacks. Remember that! Besides he is a treacherous man."

"Then you do consider him a man?" she asked in a tight, angry voice.

"It does not matter what I consider him. He is a valuable piece of property, but if he lays one hand on you or degrades you even by a look—I will kill him!"

"Jamie—"

"Enough of this! Is it not enough that I say to ignore him! Have you not yet learned that when I say something, I mean it literally and I am not required to give a lengthy explanation to you, madam, or anyone else to have it obeyed?" he asked harshly, his dark eyes flashing.

Her lips compressed into a straight line as she fought against the angry words rushing to her tongue. "Yes, m'lord!" she snapped, returning his angry glower.

His hands fisted at his sides and he turned on his heels and walked away stiffly, calling for Billy as he left. They went into a conference for a few minutes and Billy nodded several times. When Jamie turned toward her, his dark scowl still marked his face. He jumped from the gangplank and threw himself onto the back of a black gelding being held for him. Giving her a last angry look, he jerked on the bridle turning the horse, which protested loudly at the unknown treatment. Then gouging the steed sharply with his boot, he rode at breakneck speed toward Fortune's Fancy.

Katy watched him gallop off dejectedly, yet with fury still bubbling within her. With surprise she realized for the first time that she had stood up to Jamie and had not backed down.

Billy came to her side, "The Capt'n told me t' help ye gather a few things and faller him slowly."

Whirling, she ran across the deck and went below.

Billy dragged a small chest to the center of the bedchamber and stood by while Katy packed the few dresses she would need. The rest would be brought to her later. There had been no conversation between them and Katy could see disapproval in Billy's eyes and the set of his jaw.

"And what have I done to upset you, sir?" she demanded.

"I agree with my master, mum. Ye are his wife and as such

must be above gossip. Don't encourage the darkies t' be anything than what they are."

"And just what are they, sir?" she demanded.

"Slaves. Nothing more and nothing less. They're not unhappy here, mum, in fact, most'll tell ye they're better off than they've ever been. They're fed, clothed, taken care of when they be sick and they're well treated. What's more, they have purpose in life which is more'n they had in Africa."

"What is the purpose in life for a slave, Billy?"

He paused and watched her. The quiet tone of her voice puzzled him, for only seconds ago she had spoken to him sharply.

"Ter please the master and work. All men have these needs."

"Yes, that seems to be the main objective around here for all of us." She saw the question in his eyes. "To please the master. Everything else appears to be secondary."

"M'lady seems to forget that my own station in life, in truth, is only a shade above the blacks, for I'm indentured by English law fer twelve more years to the Captain. But I assure ye, mum, that life in servitude under Captain Bartlett has been a pleasant compensation when compared to the promises offered me at the end of an English rope."

Silence filled the room as Katy was brought to task by Billy's words to her own elevated station in life by the man she was so harshly judging. She turned to Billy contritely, "I'm sorry, I had no right to take my anger out on you. I guess it's because I am so tired—and apprehensive of all the extraordinary newness around me. I'm just irritable with everyone."

"Aye, I kin see where Fortune's Fancy might toss ye off the wind since the Capt'n evidently didn't prepare ye fer it. 'Course, I shoul'da suspicioned it, he ain't one fer braggin! Would y' be wantin' to rest befer we be gettin' started?"

"No, let's get this ordeal over, then perhaps I can rest."

Katy sat back against the seat of the carriage gratefully.

She knew her exhaustion was more mental than physical. The small carriage carried her slowly toward her unpredictable homecoming. She let her head rest against the leather back of the seat and sat with closed eyes, willing herself to remain calm. With each turn of the wheel the apprehension increased and she could find nothing to take her troubled mind off of the dreaded meeting at journey's end. Even the beauty surrounding her had ceased to be inspirational.

"Mum, look," Billy whispered.

The carriage came to a stop on top of a little knoll and she looked down upon Fortune's Fancy.

The big house was a two story, red brick mansion facing south. There were four windows on the ground floor turned toward the bay; a white pillared alcove sheltered the heavy front door. Five windows graced the second floor with three attic windows peeking out of the steep, red tiled roof. Two chimneys on each end of the house stood like straight, silent sentinels. White painted shutters stood open beside the gleaming, glass windows.

On the west side was a smaller house which was Lady Bartlett's quarters, Billy informed her. It was a miniature of the larger house. To the east was the great kitchen, with a colonnade leading from the house; in front of the three houses was a curved carriage road surrounded by a well trimmed yard and beautiful flower gardens; to the west, forming a square, beyond Lady Bartlett's abode, stood many cabins, which reminded Katy of a mother hen surrounded by her chicks.

Billy pointed the cabins out to her. First, the spinninghouse, weavinghouse, and sewinghouse. Across the dusty road was located the dyehouse, soaphouse and candlemaker's house. He pointed to the back and she squinted, trying to see the huge soap kettles squatting behind the little one room building. The shoemaker's cabin came next. A small church, its steeple pointing skyward, took care of everyone's spiritual needs.

About twenty-five yards away, nestled beneath a small

stand of trees was the barn with a paddock in the back; directly across the road was the carriage house with Brutus' cabin beside it. He was in charge of the horses and carriages, Billy informed her. Continuing the square with a right angle, stood the blacksmith's shop, the carpenter's shop and the cabins of the slaves, Cato and Jason.

"They be the carpenter and blacksmith."

The north lane lingered for about a mile and made another right turn. Many small one-room cabins huddled side by side, each looking like an identical twin to the following one. Next in order was the springhouse, then the smokehouse. Another right turn and the storehouse appeared, beside it the kitchen. In the middle of the great square sprawled the huge garden which fed the household. Beside each small cabin was a miniature plot which fed the individual households. Off in the background she could barely see the two other farms which Billy pointed out to her. A long, green, serpentine line of trees marked Wolf Creek.

"The tobacco farms are on the other side of the crick. The slaves bring the tobacco down on barges and store it in the sheds you saw on the wharf ter dry until the Capt'n takes it ter Jamaica or England."

She sat stunned at the vastness of the estate spread before her. Admiration for her husband filled her. That a young man had amassed such a huge plantation on his own overwhelmed her.

"His wealth must be tremendous, for it would take a fortune to operate an estate this immense," she murmured.

Billy smiled, "Aye, mum, ye didna end up marryin' any penny-pinchin' tenant farmer, fer sure."

Katy smiled, remembering earlier thoughts of living under primitive conditions.

The carriage resumed its homeward journey. Katy took a newer interest in her surroundings. She was still amazed to see the plantation laid out in a planned, civilized fashion.

"Did Jamie plan all this by himself?"

"Mostly. In the beginning he had help from an

Englishman named Kincade his grandsire had sent over here to run the original grant when Lord Thomas nearly lost everythin'. But it's taken years to accomplish. The Capt'n's sunk every doubloon he's made into it. Y' know he was with Morgan when he sacked Panama?" Katy nodded. "Well, the Capt'n saved Sir Henry's life, and that the Admiral never forgot. He gave the Capt'n the best letters-of-marque. Those letters told us where we could go after the Dons. Even if I say so meself, we were the most feared and successful of the Brotherhood. 'Course the Capt'n's devil-may-care attitude helped to keep the image up. He was fearless, still is, in fact. We took ships other captains ran away from. It seemed like the Dons jist couldn't hurt us. We would wait for the treasure ships t' come up from Peru and take 'em without effort sometimes, even though they outgunned us and outmanned us. The Capt'n had no mercy when it came to the Dons.

"He and his ship was captured once and they tortured him and his crew unmercifully. Matter o' fact, his crew was tortured to death in front of himself. He was beaten and starved until the only respite available to him was to pretend he was crazy. Then they grew lax around 'im. He waited 'is chance and one night, somehow by the grace o' God, the guard opened the door thinkin' on havin' a little extra sport outta the Capt'n. Jamie drew him off guard by pleadin' and beggin' fer mercy. Kin ye imagine the Capt'n pleadin' and beggin' fer anything?" He laughed without mirth. "He killed the guard and escaped. Some friendly Indians found him, half dead, and cared fer 'im, then took 'im to Morgan. He showed up in England, lookin' fer a ship and crew. Morgan told 'im the best crews fer piratin' was to be found in Newgate, so he showed up at the prison and bought hisself a crew—and me. From then on no Spaniard has been safe around 'im 'til Rodriguez, and ye saved his life."

"I did? How?"

"By bein' on board. The Capt'n wouldna done nothin' to 'em because of ye. That's the reason we ran from the first

ship. Lord, how that rankled the Capt'n, until ye showed up on deck. Then when we took that first volley, the die was cast and nothin' coulda saved the bastards—pardon, miss." His hand went to his cap in apology. She nodded. "But one day, we'll meet up with Rodriquez again and then he'll know the wrath o' the Hawk like the rest o' the Dons who are servin' in Davy Jones' locker."

Jamie's home came nearer and Katy's heart beat faster. If only she hadn't had that terrible scene with Jamie before he left. She wasn't sure how he would receive her, let alone his mother. She felt as if she were going to faint.

"Air ye all right, mum? Ye be so pale," Billy asked with deep concern.

"I'm so afraid."

"Don't be. The Capt'n's there. He'll have everything smoothed out fer ye."

"I hope so, oh God, I hope so."

Billy drew the carriage up to the door and stopped. Getting out, he offered his hand to Katy. She held on to him tightly as she stepped down. The red brick mansion hadn't appeared nearly so large upon the hill. Now she was overwhelmed by its monstrous size.

"They be awaitin' in the drawin' rooms fer ye," Billy murmured.

Katy followed him up the steps and into the hall. She stood inside the door, looking around her. The wide entrance hall extended to the back of the house. Near the middle a great stairway descended from a balcony above. It reminded her of the beautiful one of Sir Henry's on Jamaica, though not so grand. This one descended straight downward, with the hall running on both sides of the stairwell. The wood was a highly polished dark walnut. The center of the stairs was covered in a dark green carpet.

The first door to her left, Billy told her, was the drawing room where her husband and mother-in-law waited to receive her. He didn't notice the apprehension which had gripped Katy at his words.

"The Capt'n's library is next to the drawing room, mum. The dining hall is down there," he pointed to the last door on the right of the hallway. "That room is the sitting room. Beulah kin show ye yer new home later. But fer now—Come, Katy," Billy urged.

Katy felt a warmth within her at the use of her name and she smiled at him shyly. He took her elbow and guided her to the drawing room door, then knocked softly.

"I'll take yer chest upstairs."

"No, Billy, please stay with me," she whispered desperately.

"The Capt'n's here," he reminded her.

The door opened and Jamie faced her, then nodded for her to enter. The cold look on his face had not changed since she had last seen him; with faltering heart she looked around for Billy. He was gone.

Jamie reached for her hand, "Come in, Katy," he said softly. He gave her hand a squeeze and she looked up at him startled.

Her eyes searched the room quickly and nervously. Chairs stood stiffly against the walls, gayly flowered needlepoint covering the seats. Standing in the corner with a bouquet of roses sending out their sweet aroma was an elaborate ornamented Baroque table. A harpsichord reposed by the window to her right. It was opened as if someone had just left it. In front of the huge, barren fireplace was a French divan and two deep-seated matching chairs.

Above the mantle hung a life sized portrait of a beautiful blonde woman in a stunning, light blue gown. Diamonds sparkled from her neck and ears. Beneath the picture was the model. A little older, perhaps, but just as beautiful.

As they looked at each other, Katy did so with mingled fear and open admiration of Lady Bartlett's beauty.

A gasp escaped Jamie's mother.

"Lucy?" she asked and started forward with a frown on her face.

"No, Mother, her name is Katy."

Katy curtsied, "My Lady."

Suddenly the blue eyes became hard and cold as ice. "So you are my son's wife? It appears as if he married you just in time. Fortunate," she remarked dryly.

Katy blushed.

"Is that how you trapped him? With blushes and a demure air?"

"Mother, I told you how I met Katy."

Katy looked up at Jamie, but his face was emotionless.

"Yes, you told me you met her after Amelia turned you down for Lord Markley. Imagine that little snip preferring Markley. I just can't believe it. When did you say you were married?"

"I didn't. But if you must know it was shortly after we met," he told her coldly.

"You said you left Blyth on the fifth of February. You certainly take after your father, don't you?"

"I suppose if I must take after someone, it might as well be he unfortunately." Jamie's voice was thick with emotion.

"When will you bless me with this grandchild?" she asked Katy arrogantly.

"Do you also want me to count it for you, madam? We are expecting our son the last of October or first part of November." Jamie put his arm around Katy and drew her close to him.

Katy longed to throw her arms around him in gratitude. Instead she lifted her chin and looked at Lady Bartlett fearlessly.

"So be it. I see there is nothing that can be done about it now. Still Amelia was from good family," she sighed.

"I am not going to go into that again. Katy's tired and needs to rest."

"Yes, it does appear she is carrying quite a burden there."

"Not nearly as great a burden as you once did, Mother, for she has someone with whom to share it," he told her sharply.

Lady Bartlett's face whitened at the remark and she

turned her back on them. "Take her away," she demanded.

Jamie led his wife outside. He smiled wanly down at her. It was then Katy noticed the tired lines around his eyes and mouth and realised what an ordeal he had gone through.

"Let us go upstairs. I think I am in need of a little rest myself." He put his arm across her shoulder and they ascended the stairs.

Leading her across the balcony to the front of the house, he opened the door to the master bedroom. Katy stepped in and looked around in delight. She felt almost at home. The room reminded her of Jamie's bedchamber on board the Hawk. The room was masculine in decor with paneled walls and heavy hand-carved furniture. A heavy black and silver Persian carpet covered the floor. Upon one wall hung Jamie's crest and motto. She crossed the room and stood in front of it.

NOLITE SUBMITTERE CAPUT NEQUE VOLUNTATEM.

"How like him," she thought, positive that he had bowed neither head nor will to anyone.

He stretched out on the oversized bed and patted the empty place beside him. She sat down and took his hand in hers.

"We can change anything in the house you desire, but I am sure you will want to start in our own rooms. There are three across the front of the house, the middle one is smaller and would make an ideal nursery. The last one is a sitting room and I will have a bed put in there for me."

"Jamie, no!" she pleaded.

"I told you the way it will be until after the baby comes," he told her firmly.

"But everyone will think..."

"I don't give a damn what people think, Katy, but I am concerned about our child. I do not seem to have any control over myself where you are concerned and you certainly don't help matters. There is the alternative of saying no," he answered her raised eyebrows.

"Have you ever looked at yourself in the mirror when someone tells you no?"

"You are not going to try to tell me that you are still afraid of me after that show of temper today, are you, my little firebrand?" he asked with an amused smile.

"Yes, I am," she answered very seriously.

His smile disappeared. "I am sorry, Katy, I try not to hurt you, but it seems I can't change, I am what I am. Can you understand that?"

"I am trying."

He pulled her across his chest and gazed into the depths of emerald pools; light fingers stroked her cheek and throat gently. A small flame kindled in the pit of Katy's stomach and surged downward into her loins, settling there within a nest of butterflies. His tongue touched hers lightly, then with a gentle persuasion sought out the soft contours of her mouth. Katy's head swam dizzily, ardour soared, swelling within her, while her breath matched the accelerated beat of her pulse.

With trembling hands he pushed her away and groaned, "Lord, how I want you." He sat up on the edge of the bed and grinned at her crookedly. "That is the wrong place and wrong position for me. Come, let us see the other rooms."

He pulled Katy to her feet and let his hands linger on her shoulders. The tremble he sought to hide was betrayed in his light touch; sighing, he turned from her. Opening the door to the adjoining room they entered a smaller chamber that contained a desk and a few chairs. One window looked out toward the bay. There was a spy glass mounted on legs at the window.

Jamie watched Katy as she turned slowly in the middle of the room. Her bottom lip was caught between her teeth and a deep frown marred the smooth forehead as she turned viewing the room.

She envisioned a cradle in that corner, a chest to hold the clothes she had made for her son there, a table to bathe him upon over there... She felt Jamie's gaze upon her, and

inclined her head, raising her eyes to meet his. She matched the amused smile he tried to hide.

"Pray tell me what you find so amusing," she demanded.

His teeth flashed with his unsuppressed humour. "You women are all alike. As soon as you enter a room your minds begin whirling with ideas on how to arrange or rearrange the chamber."

Her eyes swept the small room again and when they returned to his warm gaze once more they glistened brightly from behind a misty veil.

"Tis God's truth, Jamie. I ache to furbish this room not only with baby furniture but with love. Oh, it's a lovely room for a nursery. Can't you just see it? We can put the cradle over there in that corner near the window. We can keep the glass there at the window so he can watch the bay for the Hawk's return. We can have the carpenter—Cato, that's his name isn't it—to make him a rocking horse and—" Her voice trailed off as she turned to look at his grinning face.

"You're laughing at me," she pouted.

Still grinning, he nodded.

"I don't care. My son is going to have everything. He will want for nothing."

Jamie moved to her. One arm encircled her waist and the other gently raised her face to his.

"Our son, my sweet. If I remember correctly I did play one small part in his origin, that is unless you lay claim to an immaculate conception."

"Jamie!" she cried in horror. "Do not blaspheme, not even in humour."

"Nay, that could not have been," he continued with mirth, "for I seem to remember a slight struggle beneath my aching loins that night."

Katy coloured under his laughing gaze. "That was no slight struggle, you beast, that was the final struggle of lost maidenhood."

Laughter ceased and dark sober eyes engulfed her. "Aye, and a doomed battle of a vanquished bachelor."

"Oh, Jamie, I love you so," Katy whispered.

"And I love you." He sighed deeply and stepped away from her. "My only wish is that I knew more than one way to prove it to you. It is at times like these that my mind wanders in the same low channel as my sire's, I'm afraid."

He led her into the last room beyond the nursery. The ornate design was in red, black and gold and was quite overwhelming. The furniture was of a design that Katy had never seen before.

"Chinese," Jamie explained dourly. "Mother thought since I have been nearly everywhere in the world except China, I would like it. Stifles one, doesn't it?" he grinned. "I rarely come in here. You can see why. You can start tomorrow if you care to with the changes. You may change all three rooms if you so desire."

"No, I think I'll leave the bedroom the way it is. It makes me feel at home; brings back happy memories," she smiled.

He put his arms around her and drew her near. "Katy, I do want you to be happy here."

"I will be, Jamie. All I need to be happy is you and the baby," she whispered.

He lowered his head and kissed her gently.

True to his word, Jamie had a bed put in the sitting room.

The next morning Lady Bartlett joined them at breakfast.

"Up a little early, aren't you, Mother?" Jamie asked watching her over a cup of coffee.

"I just thought I would join you. Since you have been gone for so long, we probably have a lot to discuss."

"You have never been that interested in my wanderings before. In fact, if memory serves me well, you have always been more than a little ashamed of the way I earn my money."

"Why is it, Lucy, that men seem to think their interests in life hold so little interest for us?"

"Her name is Katy, Mother."

"Oh yes—Katy—of course. I wonder why I think of you as Lucy?" she mused, then shrugged, "Oh well, no matter. Did you sleep well, my dear?" she asked Katy.

Katy looked at her husband, puzzled, then back to her mother-in-law. "Yes, M'Lady."

"And you, Jamie?"

"Yes, Mother. I slept very well." He answered in short, clipped words, which Katy was quick to recognise as a warning.

"I just wondered. You two haven't quarreled, have you?"

"No, we have not quarreled. Why the sudden interest in our well-being?"

"Well, I heard about the bed in the sitting room and I just thought maybe I could help in some way."

The lines around his mouth tightened. "No explanations are necessary as to our sleeping arrangements as far as I am concerned, but since it appears to be a household concern, I shall say this but once. Katy and I are very much in love. She is having problems carrying the baby. You tell the servants to keep their wagging tongues quiet or I will see that they cease to wag."

"If your father had treated me—"

"If I wasn't so much like my father I would share the bed with my wife!"

"Don't speak of your father in that tone of voice!" she screamed, slamming her hands down on the table, knocking over her cup.

"Do not try to cloak him, Mother. I have already told Katy of my illustrious sire." Jamie spoke in a low, terse voice.

"Lies, lies. Don't believe him. He hates my husband."

She cried, tears welling, running over, staining her face.

"Madam, I think you should go to your rooms, you are becoming quite hysterical." He rang the bell in front of him and a servant appeared immediately. "Delcy, take her Ladyship to her rooms, she does not appear to be well."

As her Ladyship came to her feet, Katy saw a drastic change mask her face. The beautiful features veiled

themselves behind a malicious visage. The blue eyes clouded over with a frigid glare, sending forth cold, stabbing glints of animosity upon whomever they pierced. At the moment that hateful glare was upon Katy, and her heart thudded painfully in her breast. With a sudden burst of strength, the deranged woman broke away from the startled Negress and threw herself across Jamie's chest.

"Oh my love, don't send me away; I can't stand being away from you." She turned her face toward Katy and hate burned out of the frigid eyes. "You slut! You'll never get him away from me. He loves me! Do you understand?" her voice rose to a frantic shriek.

Katy was stunned by the sudden transformation in the over-wrought woman and terrified by the unexpected attack upon her. She shoved her chair aside quickly and nearly stumbled over it in her haste to retreat from the irate shrew.

With a low oath, Jamie thrust his chair backwards, disengaging himself from his Mother's hands and shielding his wife from the wild, grasping clutches of the raging woman.

He shook her violently, "M'Lady, control yourself and stop this nonsense." His voice trembled with suppressed anger, yet Katy recognized the tension and fury beneath, revealed in the short, clipped overtones.

"No! I will not leave you here with your hussy. She thinks she can take you away from me like all the others tried to do, but you always come back to me, don't you, M'Lord? Oh, Thomas, why do you torture me so?" she sobbed.

Katy watched the mask fall across his face at the mention of his father. The muscle in his jaw twitched spasmodically. She felt herself trembling violently and feared she might faint at any moment from the abhorrent ordeal.

Jamie tried to capture his wife's terror-filled eyes to reassure her. He vainly attempted to break away from the raving woman's grasping, flailing hands. Grabbing hold of her shoulders, he shook her roughly. The high-piled hair cascaded down over her face and shoulders.

"Valentine! Stop it! I demand that you cease this childish tantrum immediately!" he shouted.

With the touch of his hands upon her, all madness ceased. And as quickly as it had begun, it ended. She became docile. Her infrequent sobs and tear-stained face and unruly hair were the only signs of the abrupt, violent outburst.

Holding her face in his hands, her gently pressed his lips against her forehead. "Take her Ladyship to her rooms, Delcy," he told the frightened girl. "I will come in later to see you, M'Lady."

"Yes, M'Lord," she whispered. As they started out of the room Lady Bartlett turned hollow haunted eyes to him. "You won't forget me, will you?" the exhausted woman whispered hoarsely.

"No, my dear, I won't forget you. Go rest now."

"Yes, yes, that is what I need. I'll lie down and rest and wait for you." Her softened voice trembled. She turned to look back at him once more before the young Negress could lead her away. Katy's heart ached at the wretched look that lurked in the now tranquil depths of the blue eyes.

Silently cursing, Jamie stood at the head of the table with his fists clenched at his sides. His face was ashen and his jaw bone was clenched tightly. When he had himself under control sufficiently, he went to his wife.

"I am sorry, darling," he drew her to him, "but it is best to get it over with. Now you know what she is like."

"Oh, Jamie, how terrible for you."

"But even more so for her. I can not bear the thought of confining her to a madhouse; besides she's not like that all the time."

"Oh, no, we couldn't do that." Katy shuddered at the thought of those horrible places.

His lips caressed her gently.

Someone cleared his throat behind them. Jamie turned his head at the intrusion.

"Yes, Billy?"

"Cato and his crew are here, sir."

"The carpenter," Jamie explained to Katy. "Show them upstairs, Billy. Are you ready to start tearing the house apart?" he asked pulling her toward the door. "Let's go build a nursery." He grinned with forced cheerfulness.

Cato had brought a crew of four and Katy could see that each one held her husband in deep affection and respect. After their warm greeting, they turned their attention to her.

"This is my wife, Katy, your new mistress. There are a few changes she wants to make. She will tell you where she wants to start first. You will obey her as if the instructions were my own."

"Yas sur, Cap'n. She sho is a purty little Mistress, yo brung back wid you. Beulah's goin' ter be real pleased wid a little one ter spile too." He chortled while the others shook their heads, grinning in agreement.

"Beulah?" Katy asked perplexed.

"She is our midwife, she also makes sure everything and everyone ticks around here. Beulah runs things at Fortune's Fancy. In the ten years that she has been here, I have yet to find the time and the courage to tell her who really runs this plantation."

Katy looked at him shocked. She couldn't believe her ears—Jamie cowed by a woman?

He chuckled. "No ideas, little one. I think you are interpreting my remarks incorrectly. But wait until you meet her, then you will understand what I mean. Right now she is over at Joseph MacKay's. His wife, Sarah, is having a baby. They are a young couple I indentured last year while in England. A good man, Joseph. He will be with me for six more years. I will hate to lose him."

Katy fought down the resentment that rose within her at his indifference. His eyes were quick to pick up the swift anger that flashed through hers.

A frown crossed his face, "You are angry with me. Why?"

An uncertain smile barely touched her lips and she shook her head.

He put his finger under her chin and raised her face to

meet his scowl. "Why, Katy?"

"An ocean doesn't make any difference, does it?" Her voice trembled, "To the rich a servant is just another necessary household item. I know the feeling well."

"You are quick to judge, even with no knowledge, my sweet. Joseph MacKay happens to be my friend, I hate to lose friends," he retorted in his short, clipped way. "Now I must leave you and get to my own work."

She grabbed his hand, "Jamie, don't leave me," she pleaded, panic in her voice, "I don't know anything about all of this." Her eyes circled the room, then met his. "I thought you were going to help."

"You mean you thought I would oversee it. No, my love, the house is your duty. You may as well learn your position here and I can think of no better way for your education to begin. You and Cato will handle the changes, he is a very good carpenter and I suggest you rely upon his good advice. Remember, I have a plantation to see to."

Downstairs, the front door burst open and they could hear Beulah making her way across the hall and up the stairs.

"Whar is dat skallywag? I knowed he'd come back when nobody was here ter meet'im. Cap'n, whar air yo?"

He grinned widely, "In here, Beulah, you had better hurry if you want to see my surprise."

"Surprise!" she grumbled. "He brings me home a surprise and I'm not even here ter git it. A body works day and night around here. Jist never any rest." They could hear the stairs creaking as her heavy feet found each one. "I'm hurrin', dat's all I do, hurry, hurry, hurry. Even when dey lays my body down I spects I'll still be hurrin' somewheres." She was still grumbling as she came down the hall and into the room. "Now whar's dat surprise..."

Beulah was the biggest woman Katy had ever seen. Her shoulders appeared to be twice the size of Jamie's, even though she only reached to the middle of his chest. The salt and pepper kinky head was tied up in a bright red bandana. Her bosom was huge, almost as large as two watermelons.

Everything about the woman was oversized, including her heart, Katy was to find.

As Beulah barged into the room, she stopped short and stared at the petite beauty her Master had brought home as Mistress of Fortune's Fancy. Her soft, brown eyes traveled over the girl, a great smile lit up her dark face when she saw the bulge pushing at the front of Katy's dress. Her smiling eyes met the laughing ones of her Master.

"Yo sho knows how ter make ole Beulah happy, Cap'n. Sech a purty little surprise she be, and her belly growin' big already from de planted seed."

Katy felt the blood rush to her face at the woman's words. Jamie's arm slid around her waist.

"I thought you would be pleased."

"'Bout time dis family tree started growin' agin. I thought it was stunted and de juices runnin' in de wrong direction," she grumbled. Then her eyes grew larger, "Yer did de right thing by dis little chile, didn't yo, Cap'n?"

Amusement filled his eyes. "Don't tell me you want to see proof?" At her nod, a look of irritation crossed his face. "Will someone pray tell me what is so damned important about that precious document?"

"One reprobate in dis family be enough," she chuckled. "Oh, ter see his Lordship's face when he finds a new limb growin' out of de family tree. Hee, hee," she laughed. "A limb, not a thorn, nor a thistle."

The irritation deepened at the mention of his father, but the old Negress paid no heed.

"Oops, sorry, Cap'n, I didn't mean you was a thorn or thistle. You is a proper gentleman, jist brought forth in life befo' yo' proper time." She looked at Katy again.

"My, my, a baby. A baby ter make me happy in dis, ole, dreary place after all dese years," she mused. "And a purty, little mistress ter light up these dreary, ole halls. Air yo tared, honey? Have you been gittin nuff rest!?" she asked Katy worriedly. "Dese men, dey don't know a new mama gotta git lots o' rest."

"Oh yes ma'am, I'm really stronger than I look."

"Yo jist call me Beulah now, honey chile. Beulah'll take care of yo."

"Well, I can see that I have left you in capable hands." Jamie turned from Katy to the Negress. "Katy and Cato are going to remodel our quarters. I am sure that you will help."

"Dis chile goin' ter start workin' in her condition? Over my dead body, she kin jist sit and tell dese lazy niggers what ter do. But not one little pinkie is she liftin' to do yer work—or Cato's." She turned determined eyes on Jamie and Cato.

"My work awaits me in the fields, not the house. You and Cato will do as she commands. There is a new mistress at Fortune's Fancy now, remember that, Beulah," he ordered.

"Yas sur," the slave answered properly chastised.

Katy's heart went out to the woman. Jamie could be so dominant and ill-tempered at times.

He kissed her on the forehead, "I will be back later to see how you are doing. Cato, walk me to the door."

The two women listened as the garbled voices disappeared down the hall.

"Beulah, I am so sorry. I'm sure the Captain didn't mean to be so abrupt."

"De Cap'n want everyone ter think he's de mean master he thinks he is," she chuckled. "But Beulah know how ter manage de master." Her soft gaze fell upon Katy. "But now you needs ter take a nap. I'll send some hot water up and yo can bathe, den rest some, Missy. Maybe after you takes a nap, you would like ter see yo' new home?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, what little I saw earlier was beautiful."

"Now you jist call me Beulah," she patted Katy's hand affectionately. "You jist lay down now till de water gits brung up."

"Yes, ma'am—ah, Beulah."

After the soothing bath, Katy relaxed on the huge bed. She stretched her arms full length, but her fingers failed to find the edge of the bed. She envisioned Jamie's long frame

lying beside her and turned on her side reaching across with her other arm as if to embrace him. But as in the recent past her empty arms enclosed empty air and her heart and arms ached longingly for the hard muscular feel of him beside her.

"Oh, God," she thought, "will the babe never come? Must I always bear the burdens of life alone in an empty chamber? Help me to make this truly my home. Let Jamie love me and want me as I do him."

Katy lay watching the high beamed ceiling, her hands rested upon her stomach as the baby kicked and wiggled inside. A soft smile lingered on her lips as maternal pride flowed through her. In the quiet moments of days past, as she had rested at Jamie's insistence, she had often contemplated the joy she now knew. Thanksgiving rose in her breast for the happiness that filled her.

Her thought turned back to the dreadful scene she had witnessed earlier. She shuddered, remembering the frightful look which had veiled Lady Bartlett's face as she had turned on her in insane jealousy. Katy felt the chill of fear rush over her once more as she recalled the possessive anger her Ladyship had revealed in those few horrendous moments. Would she be able to get accustomed to the demented reasoning of her mother-in-law? Somewhere during the wondering and the worrying Katy fell into a deep sleep.

Chapter 13

Beulah tip-toed around the room trying not to awaken the slumbering girl. But as her heavy feet moved about tidying up the bedroom a board here and there protested noisily.

Katy stretched and opened her eyes.

"Yo sho' is a light sleeper, honey chile. Did you git enuff rest?"

"Yes, thank you. I didn't realise I was so tired."

The Negress crossed the floor carrying a brightly flowered dress over her arm. She held it up so Katy could inspect it. "Is dis gown all right, honey?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Now yo jist call me Beulah, Missy," she reminded Katy again in a gentle tone. "When is de baby comin?" she asked while helping Katy to dress.

"Around the first of November."

"De Cap'n sho don't waste no time once he sees what he wants, do he?" she chuckled.

Katy's lips tightened at the remembrance of her first days aboard the Hawk.

"How did yo meet Cap'n Jamie, Missy?"

Katy's eyes widened at the query. "Why—ah, I was an indentured servant bound for Jamaica and Jamie was to take me there."

"Now, ain't dat strange? De Hawk ain't neber carried passengers befer." The black brow was furrowed in thought.

"Well—ah, the planter in Jamaica had other cargo and I—well, I guess I was like a piece of excess baggage," Katy added quickly. Her teeth gnawed at her bottom lip while waiting for Beulah's comment.

"De Cap'n always did have a quick eye fer de pretty ladies and good cargo," the big woman shook with mirth.

Beulah brushed Katy's hair until the copper-hued locks gleamed with a burnished luster, then tied the long curling tresses back with a bright yellow ribbon.

The large black hands fluffed the gathered lace at the bodice, while Beulah's smiling eyes rested upon her young mistress' face. "You sho are a pretty chile. I'll bet de Cap'n jist busts his buttons ebery time he looks at you."

Katy blushed and lowered her eyes.

"Da man sho was lucky to find someone like yo. Dat little hussy he kept runnin' after in England woulda ended up jist like her Ladyship. What dis country needs is good, strong blood. Women not afraid t' take dere place along side dere man and breed 'im strong sons t' carry on after dey's gone. Jist like you, honey. De Cap'n's needed you fer a long time. 'Bout time he settles down and gits dem fancy idees outta his haid about hafen t' out-do his Lordship. De Cap'n's a better man dan dat old reprobate eber was." She chuckled. "But ah kin see ah don't neber hafta worry no more. As fast as yo' belly grows dis time, dis ole house ain't neber goin' t' want fer babies."

Katy felt her face flush, and Beulah just laughed louder, until she shook all over. "White folks sure looks funny when dey gits all red like dat."

Katy followed Beulah across the long balcony. Their feet trod softly upon the same soft green carpet that covered the stairs.

"What are those doors to?" Katy asked pointing to three closed portals, one in the middle of the hallway of the balcony and two at the back of the hall.

"Them's guestrooms, Missy; de Cap'n useta bring some of his pirate friends fer a visit, but not fer a long time now."

Katy looked over the balcony railing into the immense corridor below. Three long multi-coloured carpets with long gold fringe at the ends lay upon the highly polished floor. Stiff-backed chairs with heavily-carved arms and needle-point tapestries on the backs and seats sat like silent sentries up and down the walls. Several mirrors adorned the walls with tables matching the chairs sitting beneath. Upon the tables large bowls and vases of flowers from the gardens outside the door perfumed the air with their sweet aromas of summertime.

They descended the stairs and Beulah led Katy first into Jamie's library through the door off of the hallway. To her left Katy saw high shelves reaching to the ceiling filled with books.

"Oh," she breathed, enchanted with the thoughts of so many volumes to fill the hours when Jamie would be away from her, "I never realised he read so much."

"He don't, it's only fo show now; until his old age, he says."

There were three massive bookcases and in between each a ceiling high window with small panes of crystal enticing the golden fingers of Virginia's warm sun to touch them. Multi-coloured rainbows danced across the brown and gold carpet at the radiant caress, filling the entire room with the enchanting reflections. Beneath the windows were padded seats to enjoy the beauty of the scenery surrounding them.

To her left was his desk, his papers gathered in neat piles waiting for his return. Nearby stood a well-stocked spirits cabinet. At the other end of the room, a great heavily

padded, brown leather couch similar to those used by the Turks, reclined in front of the great fireplace. Several large chairs similarly upholstered sat around the room. The fireplace was fashioned from the natural stone found on the plantation and sprawled across the end of the room.

"Does Jamie spend much time here?"

"When yo can't find de Cap'n anywhere, dis is where he'll be."

Katy crossed her arms and hugged herself, she could feel his presence in this room. This room felt like Jamie—big, manly and warm.

"De drawin' room is through dat door," Beulah pointed to the door next to the cabinet. "I understand yo'all has already seen it." Beulah's mouth tightened at the corners, thinking about the reports she had received of Katy's homecoming.

Beulah led her across the hall to the sitting room at the back of the hallway. An oval rug of rose, powder blue and gold flowers covered this floor. The walls were pale blue. Paintings of England's countryside hung on the walls, piercing Katy's heart with a longing for home. There were two windows reaching to the ceiling. Heavy rose velvet hangings were pulled back to receive the light. Soft, comfortable furniture made her feel the welcome offered in this room.

"It's so peaceful and quiet in here. I can't believe the beauty of Fortune's Fancy. And I thought we would be living among the savages under primitive conditions," she mused aloud.

"Yas mam, when de Cap'n sets out t' do somethin', he do it jist right." The white teeth flashed in a wide grin.

Beulah led her through the door to her left, into the dining hall. A great oblong carpet of gold with long gold fringe covered the center of the room. A long table, where they had dined that morning, stood in the middle of the dining hall, surrounded by chairs. The sideboard to her left took up the space from the corner to the hallway door and

gleamed brightly from the many polishings. Another buffet stood beside the pantry door across the room, ready to receive the steaming food as it was brought from the kitchen through the colonnade into the pantry and then into the dining hall. Katy stuck her head inside the pantry door to find a counter covered the three walls at waist height. Below the counter were numerous drawers. One side of the small cubicle was stacked with dishes, other shelves above the counter contained jars filled with sugar, tea leaves, spices and the other necessities Katy was unfamiliar with, as she had a poor knowledge of the art of cooking.

"Well, honey chile, dat's yer new home," Beulah informed her grinning widely.

"Oh, Beulah, it's lovely. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would live in a house so—so grand," she whispered.

Pleased at the progress she and Cato's crew were accomplishing, Katy was surprised how quickly her feminine intuition aided in refurbishing Jamie's apartment. It seemed as if all she had to do was close her eyes and she instinctively knew how that particular room should be. Each morning was met with a hitherto unknown eagerness and each night disappointment that the day had ended so quickly. She took breakfast and lunch in her room to be near to the work at hand.

Beulah was constantly on Katy's heels, cautioning her to slow down and not to work so hard. She would take Katy's hand and lead her to the bed, demanding that she rest before "'de Cap'n takes a stick to de both of us'."

Katy was fearful that the renovation wouldn't be completed before the baby's arrival. As yet she hadn't even taken the time to inspect the plantation, except the grounds and cabins in the immediate area. She had no idea how large twenty thousand acres were and at the moment no inclination to find out. She felt her main concern for the time being was the task Jamie had set her upon when she first

arrived at Fortune's Fancy. She was determined to do her very best to please him. Nothing would deter her, not even Beulah's coaxing to go visit the MacKays and see and hold their new baby.

Jamie had kept himself constantly busy and she had seen very little of him. Many times he had already left for the fields in the morning before she had awakened. At night he faced her across the long table on the brink of exhaustion, picking at his food and finally pushing it aside untouched. His clothes hung loosely upon the tall frame. Katy and Beulah were at wits end as to how to get him to slow his pace. Beulah had Matilda, the cook, prepare all his favourite dishes, but to no avail.

This night Katy could see Jamie could hardly hold his head erect.

"Land's sake, Cap'n Jamie, is you out in dem fields workin' beside dem niggers again?"

"Beulah, you women run the house and I will run the fields," he growled irritably.

"Ain't fittin' fer a white man ter work like a darky," she grumbled.

The dark scowl barely masked the exhaustion already bidding upon his face. "If you will excuse me, I shall seek my comfort in a soft bed and silent room. I have no patience tonight to sit and argue with a strong-willed woman who, it appears, will never learn to control her barbed tongue. One day I must get around to teaching you to put a bridle on it, but not tonight." He turned tired, haggard eyes upon his wife. "Goodnight, madam."

"White folks too durned stubborn," he could still hear Beulah grumbling as he left the room with Katy at his heels. He made his way wearily up the stairs.

Katy followed him into the sitting room. His bed was the only piece of furniture in the oversized room, standing mute and lonely in the corner. He stumbled to it and sat down heavily. Katy helped him to struggle out of his shirt.

"Wanted—to tell—you. Doing fine job. Can—finally

stand—this room.” His head fell back against the pillow, he was fast asleep.

She lifted one foot and then the other upon the bed and took his boots and stockings off with a struggle, panting heavily from the effort. After a rest, another tiring endeavour was attempted to remove his breeches and getting the sheet out from under the inert body. She covered his exposed body slowly, running loving eyes over the full length of his hard, muscular torso. She could feel a knot beginning to form at the back of her throat and tears stung her eyes. She sat beside him on the bed watching him sleep. He looked so vulnerable while in repose. His face was relaxed and gentle, so unguarded. She leaned over and kissed him on the mouth. He stirred slightly, but didn't arouse.

Her eyes swept the room as she arose. She was rather pleased with it, and was glad that Jamie approved. She and Cato's crew had laboured many hours ridding all evidence of that horrible red and black paint. The room stood in virginal white with gold gilt on the wooden decorations against the ceiling and walls. Twin crystal chandeliers would complement the ceiling. The white, gilded French furniture that was so popular in Louis XIV's court would grace the room. Billy was to order it while in Jamaica. Hopefully, it would be here by spring. Velvet hangings and a Persian carpet in golden hues would complete the décor.

Katy was having a portrait painted from a small miniature she had found of Jamie in one of his drawers. It would hang life-sized over the fireplace and would be her surprise to him. She turned at the door and looked at her sleeping husband once more, then closed the door quietly.

She leaned her head against the hard wooden barrier and closed her eyes tightly. His name rose silently in her throat, but she refused to release it. She knew if she did she would do something foolish, such as break into tears or go rushing back inside and beg him on bended knee to hold her, to kiss her—to love her. Loneliness was her nightly bedmate now and many nights had been spent in that wretched room just

two doors away in forsaken misery. She clasped her hands at her waist, feeling the thickening still taking place there. If only her time were near. She longed for the day that Jamie would gaze upon her with desire, but she knew that that time would never come as long as she blossomed at belly and bottom like a petunia, as Beulah had phrased it. A deep sigh escaped her and she pushed herself reluctantly away from the door, and walked slowly to her lonely room.

Jamie stood over his sleeping wife. Her long, beautiful hair fanned out around her like a flaming halo, the sheet emphasised her swollen belly and he watched the movement of his son beneath it. His throat thickened with emotion, Katy was dearer to him now than ever before. A scowl furrowed his forehead at remembrances of the feelings of lust for her that had overpowered him in the beginning; he compared them with the emotions which stirred him now. He knew the emotion which welled up in him at the moment was love, for there was no savage feelings of passion within him now, only a fulfilling of gentleness and tenderness. He had never known that James Bartlett was capable of such defenceless impuissance. He was suddenly aware of his vulnerability which left him naked and exposed to the guiles of love's fickle-minded underhandedness. Many moments passed before he was able to master himself and gaze upon his unsuspecting spouse once more with warmth.

She stirred and moaned as she stretched her arms wide, touching his leg. Her eyes opened suddenly. Surprised mixed with gladness crossed her face and she smiled at him. "You're up early, my husband."

"No, you have slept late, my wife," he grinned, sitting down on the bed beside her, kissing her on the lips. "I have been up about my duties for several hours. Right now I am hungry. I thought perhaps you would like to join me for a late breakfast."

"Oh dear, is it really late? Cato and I were going to work in

the nursery early this morning. I wonder why no one woke me?"

"Could it possibly be because I left instructions for no one to disturb you? Cato is doing something for me today, something that can not be postponed any longer."

A look of disappointment crossed her face.

"I thought perhaps if I kept him busy I might be able to entice my wife into going with me for the rest of the day." He grinned crookedly as a pleased smile lit up her face. "You haven't seen much of your new home, except on the inside. Would you like to see some of the outside?"

"Yes, I would enjoy that," she said softly.

"I have finally gotten caught up on my work, so I find I have the time to squire you around a little of Fortune's Fancy. How soon can you be ready?"

"Very quickly." She threw the sheet back, exposing her long, shapely legs and waited for Jamie to rise.

His eyes lingered on her bared flesh longingly, then traveled slowly up her body, finally meeting her eyes. Seconds passed, then a look of amusement appeared in his dark eyes.

"It may not be as quickly as you think, my sweet. You just do not uncover a delectable banquet before a starving man and not expect him to gorge himself, do you?" His large hand caressed her thigh. It appeared to Katy a derisive glint settled in his dark gaze and she was unable to look away, yet even with his mockery deriding her a pulse began to beat wildly at the base of her throat.

"As of late, my husband, I know naught what to think," she told him softly.

To Jamie, Katy's cool attitude was like a dash of ice water in his face. He had thought to make this a day of leisure for the both of them. Beulah had been berating him for working such ungodly hours and for allowing Katy to tire herself out in her eagerness to redecorate their quarter. Irritation riding him, he stood up and with a perfunctory attitude held out his hand to her.

"Come, or the day will be long spent and your new home will still be unseen. I will go downstairs and await you there."

After he had left Katy stood for many minutes staring in the mirror at her bloated body, knowing now how Jamie viewed her.

A small, open buggy waited them as they came out of the house. A thin, wizened, grey-haired Negro sat behind the beautiful sorrel mare. His mouth broke into a wide smile, revealing strong, white teeth.

"Cap'n Jamie, Missy. Good day to you."

"Missy?" Jamie looked down at her.

"Yes, that seems to be my new name. It's all right, isn't it?" she asked uneasily.

"Yes, I suppose so." He helped her into the buggy. "We will go to Mister Woodruff's today, Brutus." He turned to Katy. "Amos is one of my indentured overseers. I haven't had time to go to see how he has been doing as yet. I have been working with the Negro overseers. Things have certainly taken a lackadaisical turn this last trip and I have had a hell of a time getting them back to normal. If I didn't know better, I would swear I hadn't taught these stewards anything. And for some reason or other Amos has made it a point not to report to me. I'll get to the bottom of this laxity yet."

They drove east passing the kitchen, storehouse and smokehouse. The playing children ran to the side of the road and waved and called to them. The women working in the cabins waved from the doors and called out greetings to them.

"I see they all call you Missy," Jamie remarked dryly.

"It saves time. Mistress Katy is so long when all it's ever been is Katy. They didn't seem to want to call me that."

"No, I would imagine not. I told you once not to get too familiar with them. If you do there is a break down of discipline. With slaves we can not allow that to happen." He spoke in a matter-of-fact voice, not appearing to notice the

black man in front of him.

"But Beulah and Matilda—You are warm and friendly to them. You show affection to all whom I have seen you with," she remarked bewilderedly.

"I am the Master, they know they must show me respect. House slaves are different, they take care of our personal needs such as family does. They become our family, so to speak."

She shook her head, confused. "I see no difference."

"Just do as I tell you. When you meet the field hands you will be able to see the difference. This plantation is run with a firm hand and discipline. As long as all of us obey the rules, there can be no trouble, when the laws are broken and discipline is lax anything can happen. We had a slave rebellion a few years back. A planter by the name of Angus McDuff, who lived to the south of us lost everything he had in that rebellion. His plantation, his family—everything. The slaves went beserk and butchered and destroyed everything—men, women and children. They burned the fields, the houses and then started on each other. The rest of us planters had to go in and put the rebellion down. The sights we saw were not very pleasant. Some of the slaves are just off the ships from Africa. They are as bloodthirsty as any Indian."

"What happened to the rest of the slaves?"

"We killed them."

"All of them!"

"If they were involved in any way in the rebellion."

"What about the women and children?"

"If they were innocent, they were sold and the money sent back to England to Angus."

Katy shuddered.

"If a child disobeys you punish him."

"But, Jamie, you chastise him, you don't—"

"Katy, this was open rebellion. Murder was committed. Brutal murder. A life was forfeited for a life. Do you realize

there are more than fifty black slaves to every white man here in the colonies? That number includes our whites who are indentured also. If we had not done it that way, we would have to be looking over our shoulders all the time. I told you there were some of our customs you would have to learn, this is one of them."

"It just seems to me that if you were kind to them, they would return that kindness."

"Kindness is not the answer to this problem, strict obedience is." His tone of voice closed the subject.

By this time they had turned north and gone past the slave quarters. The cabin doors stood open and empty. All the occupants were in the fields working. They turned east again and rode down the tree-lined lane toward Amos Woodruff's home.

Across the field Katy could see an apple orchard, Jamie informed her that a peach orchard stood on the other side. The breeze carried the fruity odours toward them.

"We should be able to harvest the fruit soon. The women dry it for winter." He settled back against the soft leather back of the buggy and gazed about him with pride. "We will start on the cotton in about two weeks from the looks of the other fields. Within the month we should be able to send the Hawk to Jamaica with the first load of cotton."

"Will you be leaving also?" she asked, almost dreading the answer.

"No, Mr. Cruse can take her. I have agents in Jamaica for my cotton and tobacco this year. I will make no more trips for awhile."

She sighed and relaxed against the seat contented.

The meadow sang with the concert of the birds. Jamie pointed out a blue jay that scolded them as he flew off to their right. A beautiful, bright crimson cardinal eyed them with suspicion. Nearby a meadowlark swung back and forth in the breeze on a hedge branch. The colours and sounds of the many wild birds and the profusion of wild flowers mingled

with the lush, emerald-green meadow and merged into a beautiful vision of paradise. Katy could not get used to the feeling of space. For as far as she could see there was lush, green land obscured only by a few stands of trees.

A hewn log fence surrounded the white-washed house. They drove through the gate into the spacious enclosed yard. Voices could be heard echoing from the rear of the house. Jamie told Brutus to drive back there. About thirty adult slaves were gathered in a group murmuring angrily as a small, gaunt white man stood on a tree stump yelling at them.

"I've warned ye time and time again. There'll be no thievin' here. Rufus will be gettin' his ten lashes and maybe he'll be larnin' his lesson. I'll be hearin' no more from ye or I'll be layin' the whip ter all of ye." His face was flushed with anger.

The blacks turned toward them at the sound of the buggy. When they saw Jamie they opened their ranks. A few of the faces still carried angry, sullen looks, Katy noticed.

"Master!" A young black about sixteen years of age broke away from the Negro holding him and ran to the carriage. Brutus stopped suddenly, reining in the horse to keep from hitting the boy.

"Master, help me," he begged grabbing hold of the side of the buggy.

"What have you done, Rufus?"

"He stold from me," Amos Woodruff said harshly, coming up behind the boy, clamping his hand on the back of his neck. Rufus cringed from the pain, but didn't cry out.

The mask Katy hated so much darkened Jamie's face. "What did he steal, Amos?" his voice demanded in a cold, flat tone.

"It ain't important what he stold. The fact is, he stold, ain't that right?"

"Is that correct, Rufus?"

"Yas, master." The boy bowed his head.

"You know it is against my law to steal, don't you, boy?"

"Yas, sur."

"You know then that you must be punished."

The boy lifted pleading eyes to Jamie. His shoulders sagged dejectedly when he saw the master's eyes narrow to slits and his bottom lip draw down in finality.

Katy saw a triumphant look come into Woodruff's eyes as he belligerently turned back to the slaves.

"Tie him to the post," he shouted.

Two slaves shuffled to the boy and pulled him toward the whipping post. Rufus stiffened his legs in front and his heels plowed little furrows in the dirt. Tears were running down his cheeks and racking sobs tore at his throat. One of the blacks kicked his legs out from under him and they dragged the whimpering boy the rest of the way. One held him up straight, while the other secured him to the cross beams by leather straps.

"Jamie, don't you think we should find out what it was he stole?" Katy whispered frantically.

"Stay out of this, Katy!"

"But he's just a boy," she pleaded.

Dark angry eyes turned on her. "Do not interfere!"

"Kin I take her ladyship away from here, Master?" a quiet voice asked at Katy's elbow.

Katy turned to find herself looking into two gentle, brown eyes. The girl's skin was a light brown. Her hair black, but long and straight instead of kinky. High cheekbones protruded from a narrow face. An aquiline nose and thin lips attested to her Indian blood. She was slender and also very pregnant, yet held herself erect and moved with a regal grace.

"Yes, Amanda, please do."

"Come, my lady, we will go away from this place."

She helped Katy down and led her toward the front of the house. As they moved away, Katy heard the first blow fall and her cry mingled with the boy's. She felt a pang stab through her lower stomach and stumbled. Amanda grabbed her and they held on to one another for several seconds. Katy brushed her tears away and straightened up. She looked into

her companion's eyes.

"Don't worry, my lady, Rufus'll be all right. Ten lashes ain't too many. He coulda got twenty-five 'cause he's stold before."

"What did he steal that would warrant ten lashes?"

"Mr. Amos' plant pie fo' his dinner."

Katy couldn't believe her ears. "His pie?"

"Yas ma'am Mr. Amos is partial ter rhubarb pie and when Rufus helped hisself ter some of it, he got awful mad."

"No, it's unbelievable. I can't believe that that man—You can't mean that he would beat someone for a piece of pie! I must go tell Jamie." She turned to retrace her path, another blow fell and Katy cringed.

"No ma'am, don't bother de master about it. Besides he kin't do nothin' anyway."

"But—but of course he can, he's the master here."

"He kin't do nothin' in public to Mr. Amos."

"Why?"

"It would destroy de discipline."

"Discipline!" Katy spat out the word as if it left a foul taste in her mouth. "I'm sick of hearing about discipline that has to be enforced by fear and a whip. How can you be so calm about it? The boy is one—one of—your people."

"Dat boy is also my brother, but he broke de master's law and must be punished," the girl spoke very low and Katy strained to hear her.

"Your brother..." Katy shook her head back and forth, biting her lower lip to keep from crying. "Oh, I'll never get used to this brutal place."

The girl put her hand on Katy's arm and gently pulled her toward the peach tree shading the side of the house.

"Let's sit here, my lady, until you quiet down abit."

Katy sat clumsily down, still crying. There was no sound now except the quiet sobs and the sound of leather on bare flesh. Everytime the lash fell Katy's body unconsciously

jerked. They heard the murmur of many voices as the slaves moved restlessly.

"Now, go finish yer dinner an git back ter the fields," Amos told them harshly.

The blacks moved off toward their cabins grumbling to each other.

Katy saw Jamie talking to Amos. She could tell there was an argument between them.

"Amanda, you go and fix your husband his dinner. I will be all right now."

"I don't have a husband, my lady," she said quietly.

"But—I thought..." Katy stammered.

The girl smiled shyly. "I thought I'd have one too. Only der are rules first."

"Rules?"

"We have ter git permission from de master first."

"Well, I'm sure my husband will—"

"It's not dat easy," the girl replied slowly.

"What is it then?" Katy asked puzzled.

"Wal," Amanda said hesitatingly, "de baby's father is a big, handsome buck named Apollo and he ain't serposed ter git married."

Katy blushed and said bitterly, "So I've heard."

"Y' know 'im?"

"I've—seen him once. Do you love him, Amanda?"

"Oh-h, yes'um."

"Does he love you?"

The girl's eyes clouded. "I don't know, mistress, sometimes I think he do." She paused. "He loves—women. He's serposed ter. But sometimes he tells me he loves me most." She added quickly, a shy smile lighting up her face.

"Do you want to marry him?"

A wistful look saddened her eyes once more. "More'n anythin'. But we kin't."

"Why?"

"'Cause Apollo is serposed ter—Oh, yer ladyship, I kain't tell you." She cried.

Katy patted her hand. "I know all about it, Amanda. Let me speak to my husband and see what I can do."

"Oh, my lady, I'd ever be in yer debt."

Katy struggled to her feet and started to the buggy. "Amanda, come and see me tomorrow. And please call me Missy."

Amanda's eyes glistened with happiness and she nodded her head eagerly.

That evening after supper Katy followed Jamie into the library as was her usual custom of late when he wasn't too tired to concentrate on the bookkeeping part of running the plantation. While he labored over his paper work, she read or just sat and watched him.

He noticed she was preoccupied all evening and as he tried to catch up on the back work his eyes kept straying to her. Her forehead was creased as if in deep thought and she was very quiet. Jamie crossed the room and sat down beside her.

"You appear to have a problem with no answer in sight."

"Perhaps so," she answered hesitantly. Now that the moment had arrived to keep her promise to Amanda, she felt timid.

"Are you going to tell me what is bothering you, or do I sit here all evening and play guessing games?"

"It's about Amanda."

He frowned. "I was afraid that that was part of it."

"You know she is going to have a baby—"

"Well, it wasn't too hard to guess that was her problem," he replied dryly.

"She's not married."

"So Amos told me."

"Don't you think she should be married?"

"Why? Just because she is pregnant?"

"Of course. The baby needs a father."

"The baby has a father." She didn't notice the chill which

had crept into his voice and across his face.

"I mean, he needs a real father and Amanda should be married."

"It doesn't have to work like that in every case, Katy. The Negroes are not like whites, they don't feel like they *have* to marry."

"Jamie, you, of all people, wouldn't let that baby be born without a father."

"Katy, I want you to stay out of this business with the slaves."

"It doesn't have anything to do with slavery, Jamie, she's a pregnant woman in need of a husband."

"You put too much importance upon a few spoken words," he told her coldly.

"Jamie, she loves him!"

"It is impossible for her to marry Apollo." He got up and walked to the window and stood with his back to her.

"Billy told me about Apollo's—function on the plantation. Apollo is not an animal, he's a man, with a man's needs."

He whirled around, facing her angrily, "Then if you know about Apollo's—function, as you call it, then you know it is impossible for him to marry. And as you can see by looking at Amanda, his manly needs are well taken care of."

"A man's needs are more than just going to bed and making love to a woman," her voice was low, tight with anger.

"Since when have you become an authority on a man's needs, madam?" he asked her sadonically. His eyes glowered brightly and in a terse voice he said, "Do not meddle in things that do not concern you."

"I didn't realize I was meddling. I was trying to right a wrong. Evidently there is no right or wrong in slavery here, there's just the Bartlett way," she told him bitterly.

"You have got to learn that these people are like little children. They must be guided in their every move."

"I don't believe that."

"You saw Rufus today, he knew he was guilty of stealing."

"Oh, yes, I saw him! A sixteen year old boy, probably hungry, being beaten for taking a piece of pie from that—that Amos Woodruff."

"There are no sixteen year old *boys* in this wilderness. You cease to be a boy at twelve or thirteen, sometimes before that. I started this plantation when I was seventeen. As for stealing the pie, Rufus steals anything he can get his hands on. He was not hungry. My slaves are well fed! He saw that pie and wanted it, it's as simple as that. He had been warned before what would happen to him. He did not obey the law so he was punished," he snarled.

"But to beat him with a whip—" she shook her head in disbelief.

"Katy, I told you about the rebellion we had here. I do not want that to happen at Fortune's Fancy, nor to my family. And it won't happen as long as there is discipline and obedience. The slaves know that. I want you to know it too." The cold fury in his voice frightened her and she moved away from him.

After a few seconds of silence Katy asked in a tight, angry voice, "What kind of work does Amanda do?"

"She helps Mrs. Woodruff," came the short reply.

"You have asked me to choose one of the women as a servant, I want Amanda. I also want Rufus away from that man."

"I will inform Amos in the morning," came the same clipped tone.

"Does she live over there, if so I will go get her."

"No, she and Rufus live just beyond the icehouse in the cabin her parents used to have. They are dead. Beulah and her family live next door to her. Beulah has looked after her since her parents died."

"How convenient for Apollo," she replied dryly.

"Amanda knew about Apollo. Whatever happened there was not done in ignorance, but was done without my consent. She knew he could not marry. When the two boys

have passed their prime and want to get married, they can, but right now the answer is no. Besides, I don't think Apollo would even consider it. He thinks he is one fiesty rooster in a henhouse."

She turned to him angrily. "It isn't funny. I think it's vile and contemptable."

"It was not meant to be funny. It is the truth. It is also cheaper than buying at the slave auctions."

She shuddered. "I just can't imagine anyone condoning using those two boys like animals."

"It's the way it is over here. More and more planters are doing it, not just me. You will have to get used to the idea and accept it."

Katy knew that was the final word on the subject. He stood watching her through angry eyes. She felt exhausted from the battle and resigned to defeat. The irritation slowly dissipated and she went to him. Putting her hand on his arm, she told him contritely, "Jamie, I'm so sorry. I will try to understand your ways. I don't think I'll every fully understand them. I love you so much, I can't bear this breach between us."

"You know that I love you, Katy. But I will not let you use it as a tool to change me," he told her stiffly.

She jerked her hand away and stiffened, "I never intended to use your love as a tool against you. If I used it at all, it would be as a tool for peace between us. Goodnight, sir!" She turned away quickly, tears blinding her.

He grabbed her wrist, "This conversation is far from over, madam! You will not leave this room!"

She wrenched her wrist from his grasp and lifting her skirts ran out of the room and up the stairs. Turning, she saw he was following close behind, his eyes still dark with rage.

As she turned back, her foot slipped on the carpet and she felt herself falling. "Jamie!" she screamed.

His hands grabbed her roughly and drew her close to his chest, trying to break the fall with his body. The carpeted stairs scraped and tore at his back and ribs as he slid down

them, coming to rest at the bottom with a dull thud. Katy felt as if she were thrown from his arms. She lay stunned for a few moments until the room stopped spinning and everything came back into focus. Rising to her knees, she saw Jamie sprawled out at the bottom of the staircase. Whimpering, she crawled to her husband.

Beulah came panting out of the back of the house. Her bulky body moving faster than she had moved for years. Matilda followed, drying her hands on her apron, concern written across both their ebony faces.

"Missy, what happened? What's de matter wid de Cap'n?"

Katy sat back on her heels, wringing her hands and sobbing. She struggled to compose herself, "I fell down the stairs and he tried to catch me," she wailed. "Oh, Beulah, I think he's dead! He isn't moving—I don't think he's breathing." Her voice strained to a high pitch.

"Dere, dere, Missy, don't take on so till we finds out jist what's wrong." She eased her big bulk down beside Jamie, Matilda beside her.

"Matilda, go git dat worthless husband o' mine and dat son too, dey's in de kitchen."

Matilda hurried off and soon returned with Calab; Apollo following in the rear.

"Carry de Cap'n upstairs," Beulah instructed. "Careful. Apollo, he ain't no bag o' grain, yo knows," she cautioned sharply.

Katy hurried up the stairs ahead of them. Opening her bedroom door, she directed, "In here," and rushed to the bed, turning it down.

"'Bout time he's put whar he belongs," Beulah grumbled, while the floor protested wearily beneath her heavy tread.

Apollo and his father stepped back as Beulah came to the side of her master. Katy could feel Apollo's eyes watching her. She tried to ignore him, but it felt as if his eyes were boring small holes into her back. She finally raised her gaze to meet his. His eyes met hers directly. He refused to drop the intense stare as the other slaves did. She felt the blush

starting up her throat and spreading across her face as an insolent look traveled the length of her body and regarded her closely. An amused smirk crossed his face and settled at the corners of his mouth at her embarrassment.

Katy felt indignation stir her heart and she turned away from him with quiet fury. Beulah was watching them, her eyes revealing nothing of the fear she felt in her heart for her son. To hide her anxiety, she bent over the unconscious man; sensitive fingers explored the wounds with a gentle touch.

"Is he all right?" Katy asked fearfully, reaching out she pushed Jamie's hair back from his forehead.

Beulah straightened up from the examination. "I think so. Der's a big lump on de back of his haid."

"We need Josiah. I don't even know where he lives. I haven't seen any of the crew since we arrived."

"De Cap'n built a little town down de crick fer his crew and their families. Hawk's Lair, dey calls it."

"Can someone go after Josiah Denton? He's the Hawk's doctor."

"Apollo, yo can go."

"Yas, Mammy."

"Yo comes wid me." He smiled at Katy once more before following his parents out of the room.

Once outside Katy could hear Beulah scolding Apollo. "Don't yo eber look at de Missy lak thet again. De Cap'n'll nail yo hide to de fence."

Apollo laughed and muttered an unheard reply.

"She's a white woman and wife to de master. He'll kill yo—" her voice trailed off as they started down the stairs.

"Oh, God, have I let him think I desire him?" Katy thought frantically. "Or is he so sure of himself that he thinks he can have any woman, black or white, married or no?"

Chapter 14

Time seemed to pass on leaded wings. Katy spent the time running between window and bed, searching for a sign of the doctor's appearance. Finally, the rapid beat of hooves drummed across the meadow toward the house. Taking a quick glance out of the window, Katy ran across the room and down the long hallway, pausing at the top of the staircase.

"He's in here," she said breathlessly, grabbing the doctor's hand and pulling him down the hall. "Thank you for coming so quickly."

"Where else should I be, but here?"

Katy sat down wearily on one of the large, comfortable chairs near the bed and watched Josiah examine her husband. He turned Jamie's head, examining the large bump at the base of the skull. Opening the eyelid, he checked each unperceiving eye by running a candle back and forth in front of his face.

"Looks like a concussion." He checked the abrasions on

his back and felt his ribs. "Couple of broken ribs too. You didn't take another bottle to him, did you?" he asked grinning.

"No, of course not. He caught me as I tripped on the stairs and slid down them on his back. I guess it was my weight on top of him that caused . . ." tears choked her as she beheld the red, raw, bleeding wounds of her husband.

"Were you hurt? Do you have any pain?" he asked anxiously.

"No, no, I'm fine. Jamie caught me in time. He'll be all right, won't he, Josiah?"

"As Billy told you before, he has a hard head. He'll have to stay in bed for a couple of days, but other than that he should be sound of wind and limb."

"You can try to keep him down then. He has been working from daylight until dark and he won't want to stay abed."

"There won't be any trouble keeping him in bed, take my word for it." He frowned. "What has he been doing that keeps him away that much?"

"Look at his hands."

Josiah turned one of Jamie's hands over. It was rough and calloused and stained with tinges of green. "Good Lord, it looks like he's been working in the fields."

"He has."

"But why? Is he short-handed? The crew could help if that's the case. All they're doing is gambling, drinking and whor—I'm sorry."

"No," Katy sighed, "he is not short-handed."

"Then why does he feel like he has to work in the fields like one of his niggers?"

"He feels he has to come home every night worn out." She blushed and lowered her eyes. "More than that, you will have to ask Jamie."

Josiah clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "Ah." He studied the Captain's lady. For such a small-

hipped woman it appeared she was going to bear a large baby.

"How soon are you expecting?"

"Sir Henry's midwife told me the last of October or the first of November," she replied ill at ease.

"Approximately two and a half months," he mused. "Would you allow me to examine the baby?"

She spread her hands in alarm. "What do you mean 'examine the baby'?"

"If you'll lie up here beside the Captain, I'd like to put my hands on your stomach and feel the baby—to make sure he's getting along all right."

"Well," she said uneasily, "I don't know if Jamie would allow that or not."

"Katy, I'm a doctor. I have no other motive for this examination. Trust me."

"I—I suppose it will be all right." She rose slowly and went to the bed and lay down.

Josiah leaned over her and moved his hands several times across her stomach. The baby commenced to move and Josiah took hold of the curve of rump or head. He had his eyes closed tightly, as if in a deep concentration and muttered to himself now and then.

"You seem to have a very healthy and active fetus in there," he told her, eyes still tightly closed. "Everything appears to be progressing well. He's high enough that there should be no difficulties between you and Jamie for at least another month, perhaps a little longer."

She could feel the crimson creep across her cheeks and was glad his eyes were veiled.

"Yes, I think everything is fine. His head is a little large and your hips are quite narrow, therefore your pelvic area will be a little problem to us, but nothing to worry about. Who's going to deliver you?"

"Beulah's the midwife."

"Is she good at midwifery?"

"I suppose so, why?"

"No particular reason, I was just—"

Jamie groaned and Josiah helped Katy to her feet. They both hurried to his side. Jamie opened his eyes and blinked several times before they would focus.

"Josiah, is that you?"

"Aye, sir."

"What happened? My head is splitting open."

"It's a good thing you have a hard one, Captain, it seems to take a lot of hard knocks."

"Katy!" Jamie tried to sit up and then grabbed his head, moaning, falling back against the pillow. "Where's Katy, was she injured?"

"I'm here, Jamie, and I'm fine."

"Are you sure?" he frowned, as if trying to think. "I seem to remember you were falling."

"But you caught me and hit your head."

He ran his hand across his side.

"You have a couple of broken ribs, sir. I've been waiting for you to wake up so I can bind you."

"I don't know if I can sit up. I feel ill."

"Ma'am, bring a basin in case he has to use it."

Katy brought the wash basin from the commode and stood close to the bed. Josiah helped Jamie to sit on the side of the bed and proceeded to bind him tightly with the linen strips Beulah had left behind. Jamie motioned frantically to Katy and she moved the bowl closer as he vomited in hard racking heaves. He held his hands to his ribs and gasped in pain between the qualms.

"Aren't you finished yet, Josiah?" Jamie demanded irritably.

"Almost," the doctor answered, wrapping the binding quickly.

"Hurry, I can not stand this nausea much longer." The kecking continued until Jamie was bathed in a cold sweat and shuddered from the weakness that came over him in waves.

"Let's lie back, Captain," Josiah said softly and helped

him to recline against the pillow. "Katy, get a cold cloth, please."

Katy hurried to do his bidding; returning with the damp cloth, she handed it to the doctor. Josiah gently wiped the sweat from the Captain's face.

"Why am I so ill and weak?"

"You have a concussion and it makes you sick when you move. Therefore, I don't want you moving around too much or trying to get out of bed for a couple of days."

"You have me at a disadvantage, doctor."

"And I intend to keep you there, sir, until you are well. I want lots of rest for you, starting right now." He took Katy's arm and led her away from the bed.

"I hate to drive you out of your bedchamber, madam, but I'll have to wake him up and check him every so often. Is there somewhere else you can sleep?"

"I'll sleep in Jamie's—I mean, I'll sleep down the hall." She went back to the bed and kissed her husband on the forehead; he was already asleep.

"Goodnight, Josiah, and thank you for coming."

"Goodnight, m'lady." He watched her walk down the hallway and enter a room nearby. A deep frown creased his forehead as he pondered the situation.

All the next day Jamie and Josiah talked inbetween the Captain's naps. They talked about ships, their love for the sea, women, their buccaneer days, battles each had been engaged in until at last they ran out of talk and a silence fell between them. A deep silence, made even more so because of all the sonorousness which had preceded it.

"Your wife looks good."

"Yes, Katy appears to be doing well now. She has been decorating our apartments since we arrived. Plantation life seems to agree with her. She has been frantically trying to finish the nursery before the baby arrives. She has already completed the other room. I believe it is to be her room of

retreat, so to speak, from my mother," he paused, "—or perhaps from me, who knows; this being my first experience with a pregnant woman—" he shrugged and the doctor recognised the bemused attitude that all new husbands and fathers find themselves confronted with sooner or later.

Jamie felt the conversation was leading up to something, but his brain seemed to be functioning slowly, and he couldn't make heads or tails of the direction of the discussion.

"Or perhaps your own private retreat?"

Jamie's eyes narrowed, "What is that supposed to mean?" he demanded.

"Are you two happy with one another, Captain?"

"Yes, dammit! What are you fishing for, Josiah?"

"Well, sir, from a couple of things your wife let slip last night and after examining your hands, I was wondering if I might counsel you in any way?"

"When I want your advice, doctor, I will ask for it," Jamie told him harshly.

"I mean, since this is your first child I thought perhaps you wouldn't know it is still safe to sleep with your wife until the baby drops, for instance."

"That is enough, doctor!" The familiar scowl crossed his face. "What makes you so damned sure I do not sleep with my wife?"

"Because she slept in your room last night, in the room of retreat, I believe you called it." Josiah watched the bone in the Captain's jaw work savagely. "There's no need for you to work your frustrations off in the field, sir."

"You go too far, sir," Jamie growled.

"I intend to go further, Captain, so you might as well plan to listen for once."

The scowl on the Captain's face darkened, the eyes turning to blackened coals.

"When a woman is pregnant, she feels undesirable. When a husband moves out on account of her pregnancy because

he fears he will injure the babe or his wife, she feels unloved. I presume you have not taken a mistress because of the way you are work—”

“You presume too much, doctor, and I order you to silence,” Jamie tried to rise and fell back weakly.

“You’re going to listen to me, Captain, as you’re in no condition to do otherwise. Show your wife you still love her. Don’t be afraid to touch her, to love her. She’s going to need that assurance when the child comes.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, she’s going to have a hard labour. Her pelvic area is very small and the baby’s head is very large.”

“How do you know all this?”

“Because I examined her.”

“You did what!”

“I examined Katy.”

The captain’s voice came in a low, rasping hiss, “Doctor, I shall have you flogged. I will lay the stripes on myself.”

“I assure you, Captain, the examination was done in a most professional and respectful way and caused her no embarrassment. If anything, naught but good was derived from it, for it revealed that I must be here when she delivers.”

“Beulah is the midwife; she will deliver the baby,” came the caustic reply.

“Then your wife will die, Captain.”

“What makes you think you can help her anymore than a trained midwife?”

“I have lived with the Indians in Yucatan and learned their secrets.” He studied Jamie for a few silent moments. “Captain, I need to be here when your wife delivers. She’s going to travel through the realms of hell, please believe me. I can help to alleviate some of the pain.”

The Captain continued to stare at the ceiling and the silence lengthened. The doctor sensed the turmoil swirling inside the quiet young man and waited.

“I suppose you heard about Katy and me from the crew,” the words came short and clipped.

"Aye, there was some gossip aboard..."

"But what you do not know is, if she dies, I will have killed her."

"Captain, all husbands feel—"

"What do you know what all husbands feel?" Jamie snapped. "In this case it's true. I thought she was a whore when Billy brought her aboard the Hawk. After all, that is what had been ordered for me. I ended up raping her and finding out she was a virgin. The baby she is carrying was not conceived in love as he should have been!"

"But he is carried in love, Jamie. There's no sense punishing yourself for what might have been. There's never been any doubt in the minds of the crew that the two of you love each other, but right now there might be just the slightest in Katy's mind. You must convince her all over again of that love."

The words had a familiar ring to them. He remembered Billy had once counselled him in the same way under similar circumstances.

Once more the nausea swept over him in waves and sweat beaded his face from the effort to hold it back. The weakness which engulfed him yielded to the overpowering surge, then he fell back against the pillow exhausted. Gratefully he succumbed to the mantle of sleep and welcomed its warm embrace.

Jamie awoke to the sound of whispering and on looking around saw Katy talking to Josiah. She saw him move and rushed to his side.

He offered her a half-hearted smile as she bent to kiss him, "Darling, how do you feel?"

"Rotten." He turned his eyes toward Josiah, then closed them tightly, groaning inwardly. "How long does this damned nausea last?"

Josiah wiped the Captain's face with a cool, wet cloth. "Sometimes for several days. It's according to how bad the concussion is. You must have really whacked your head

soundly. Let me check your eyes again."

"Why do you check them, Josiah?" Katy asked.

"See the iris? Look at this one, now this one." Josiah held the lighted candle in front of Jamie's eyes, moving it back and forth as he explained to the anxious wife. "See the difference in the size of them? They should be the same. When they are, we can think about letting him up. 'Course there's been no big battle from him on that score, he's as weak as a newborn kitten right now. In fact, if there is anything you've been wanting, now is the time to get it, as he will give you no grief."

Green eyes searched the depths of ebony-hued ones. A wistful smile touched Katy's lips and a soft sigh escaped the curved lips, for Jamie's mocking eyes had taken on a weakened but familiar glint. "No, I'm afraid you're wrong, Josiah. He's not that weak. He's still strong enough to be master here." She touched her lips lightly to the slight derisive curve at the corner of his mouth which matched the gleam in his eyes.

Then moving to the door, she motioned to someone. Jamie saw the graceful stride of Amanda crossing the floor. She looked lovelier than ever. Happiness made her face glow from the peace and contentment she felt from within.

"Cap'n, I came to thank you fer lettin' me serve Missy. I'll take good care of her fer ye."

"Good, good. Thank you, Amanda."

"Kin I do anythin' fer you, sir?"

"No, the doctor seems to be taking care of everything."

The tall man was eyeing her with approval. Blue eyes, the color of a clear summer's day, traveled the length and breadth of her while a smile settled across the long narrow face. Shoulder length, yellow hair framed the pale, grinning countenance, falling across his forehead, almost hiding the purplish scar that insisted on peeking out from beneath the tawny mass. The dull white canvas jerkin did little to conceal the lightly furred muscular chest nor the hard, flat belly. The long, thick corded arms hung to his sides and to her

dismay the wellfavoured grace was disrupted by the scarred and mutilated fingers of his left hand. She kept her eyes lowered until she was sure her face didn't reveal the pity which had pierced her at the discovery of the imperfection.

She had always found the English with the yellow hair and pale eyes the color of the sky fascinating and oft times wondered how their skin and strange color of hair and eyes ever came to be. Except for only a few of the Captain's crew, Lady Bartlett was the only one she had ever seen so ghostly pale. When she had been younger her Ladyship had often become very angry at the young girl with the skin the color of Café au Lait following and staring at her continually.

Now in her mind's eye, Amanda compared the pallid Englishman, standing before her with admiring eyes, with Apollo—finding there was no comparison. She smiled back at him shyly.

"Amanda's giving me some ideas for the nursery," Katy explained. "Let's leave the men to whatever men do when they're alone." Katy blew Jamie a kiss before she closed the door.

"Well now, that is what I call a woman. Her husband is one fortunate man."

Jamie frowned. "She is not married."

Josiah's eyebrows shot upward. "Oh?"

"One of the studs got to her. The baby should be exceptional. And hopefully, a boy."

"Yes, that would be fortunate."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Jamie asked sharply.

"Oh, nothing. I suppose I shall never get used to the casual way you plantation owners now have over this breeding program that appears to be catching on. It seems to be spreading everywhere now. I ran across the same thing around Jamaica and the other islands." He raised his hand. "Don't get all upset. I can see your point, I just can't get used to the idea of using men as breeders the way we do animals. Of course I have never heard your comment on whether you consider the negro as a man or not." He waited for Jamie's

comment, but the Captain only glowered at him.

Jamie's sharp reply severed the silence. "Maybe I am too casual about it. But it just seems the logical thing to do. The price of slaves is getting to be ridiculous, not to mention the cost of maintaining them." Jamie's voice carried an edge to it, as if he were on the defensive.

"I don't know what the father of the baby looks like, but if the child looks anything like its mother, you've got fine stock on the way."

The captain eyed the doctor narrowly; there was something about the way Josiah phrased his remark that irritated Jamie but he couldn't put his finger on it.

Jamie was in bed three days before the headaches and nausea finally cleared up. Josiah examined his eyes and sat back satisfied.

"Well, it appears I'm going to lose a patient. You seem to be hale and hearty at last."

"Good, it's about time." Impatiently, Jamie sat up. His face paled at the sudden movement.

"I should have warned you about that. You know you've been flat on your back for several days. You'll have to take it easy for a couple of hours at least or you'll find yourself flat on your face again. Here, let me get you a brandy. That should help some."

"Any excuse is fine with me."

"The doctor needs one also, sort of a reward for putting the Captain back on his feet," he remarked as he poured the two drinks.

"I haven't asked how the crew is getting along," Jamie said as he accepted the offered refreshment.

"That is quite a town you had built for your crew, sir. All the comforts of home. Only sometimes comforts seem to pinch a little and the men are getting restless."

"We should have the cotton ready in about two weeks and the Hawk can leave for Jamaica."

"The crew will be glad to hear that. Are you going with the Hawk?"

"No, I will wait until after the baby comes before I make anymore trips. I had best be here to pay a little attention to my wife. The doctor's orders, you know." They saluted each other with their glasses. Jamie's eyes gleamed with amusement and anticipation over the rim of the goblet.

"I do want to be here when the baby comes, just in case, you understand."

Jamie nodded soberly.

That afternoon after Josiah left, Jamie found Katy reading in the library. Creeping up behind her, he planted a kiss at the nape of her neck.

"Jamie," she turned laughingly toward him. "You look so much better. How do you feel? Are you supposed to be up so soon? Has Josiah left?"

"Slowly, slowly," he laughed, "one question at a time. I feel well enough, except when I laugh, then I feel like someone is twisting a knife between my ribs. Yes, I have been given permission to be up, among other things. And Josiah is probably already back at Hawk's Lair. But never mind me. Come, I have a surprise for you." He took her hand, helping her to her feet. Katy felt drawn into the depths of the fathomless pools of his loving gaze, even as she surrendered to the warmth of his embrace. His mouth lowered to hers and she felt ardent lips nearly devouring her in his hunger. The trembling began in her knees and slowly crept upward. Putting her hands against his chest, she pushed firmly until he released her with a shaky laugh. Still standing with her hands against his chest she looked at him in shocked surprise, her body still trembling from the emotions churning inside.

"Uh—doctor's orders," he stammered, feeling a sudden lack of composure steal over him.

"We should have the kind doctor here more often," Katy murmured, dimpling at his embarrassment. "Just what were the kind doctor's orders, my love? Just in case I should need to administer some vile tasting medicine or bind you that you

may heal that much faster."

Encircling her waist, he drew the teasing coquette against him. "'Tis unnecessary to bind me, my sweet, you accomplished that feat in these many months. As to vile tasting medicine, if your lips be that elixir then I gladly bow to the doctor's orders and seek my medicine willingly and often." As he lowered his head to fulfill the promise, a movement in the background caught his eye.

Lady Bartlett stood in the doorway regarding the young lovers with a warm regard. Katy felt a sigh of relief escape.

"I see you have quite recovered your health and strength," she commented in amusement.

Jamie grinned at her affectionately. "It doesn't take a Bartlett long to regain his amatory charms, madam, as you are well aware."

"I intended to visit you while you were ill, but I have been so busy, and besides I knew that you would not stay that way very long, you are so disgustingly healthy, as you have always been."

"I slept most of the time anyway."

"Are you well, my dear? I think one of the servants said you fell or something."

"Yes, m'Lady, but I'm fine."

"Good, we mustn't do anything rash and lose that grandchild of mine. Go on about your business, I just came in to borrow a book."

Everytime Katy saw her Ladyship the mystery around her continued to grow. "Never once has she reacted as I expected her to," Katy thought and the enigma of the beautiful woman caused a perplexing frown to settle between Katy's brows.

Jamie led Katy upstairs toward the nursery. "Now, close your eyes and don't open them until I tell you to do so."

She shut her eyes and let him lead her inside the small room.

"Now, you can open them."

His foot touched the rocker. Before Katy stood a hand-carved cradle rocking back and forth. It was of cherry wood and had been sanded, varnished and waxed to a satiny smoothness. At the head, two little cherubs faced each other with two hearts intertwined. Jamie's name in one and Katy's in the other.

"Oh, Jamie, it's lovely." She dropped to her knees and ran loving hands over the smooth wood.

"That's the job I had Cato working on. Also this." He pointed to a matching miniature chest which was similar to his own aboard the Hawk.

He helped her to her feet, and she hurried to the coffer, opening the lid and the drawers in her excitement. The baby's clothes lay inside in neat little piles.

"Amanda helped too."

Katy ran to him and put her arms around him, hugging him tightly against her. "Jamie, they're just beautiful. Cato kept putting me off about ordering the furniture. Kept saying something about the Captain having some, somewhere. I never dreamed it would be this beautiful." She pulled his head down and kissed him.

"Ouch!"

"What's the matter?" she asked in alarm.

"You, madam, are going to have to teach that little brat some manners—he just kicked me," he told her in mock anger.

They laughed together. Katy's heart sang, as it had been so long since they had shared their laughter and joy. They spent the rest of the afternoon talking, planning and enjoying each other's company.

"It's a wasted day in any case, we might as well waste it together," was Jamie's philosophy.

"Where is Billy? I haven't seen him for days?"

"He's getting the Falcon ready for sea."

"The Falcon?"

"You knew the vessel as the Del Norte Lux. That sounded

too foreign to Billy's ears, so he changed it. He's going to command it. Says I don't need him any longer since I have a wife. He wants to go back to sea."

"Poor Billy. I've driven him away from home."

"Nay, lass, he's wanted to do this for a long time, only he felt I needed someone to keep an eye on me. He was getting worse than an old mother hen this last trip. Every time I turned around I was stepping on him."

"You're not going to sell the Falcon then?"

"Not right now. It looks as if we are going to have the best harvest we have ever had. If so, we will be able to use both ships to carry it to Jamaica; besides the men want to do a little accounting. If I furnish the ship, I share in the profit."

"Do you need the money that badly?"

"Katy, like most land owners, I am land rich and cash poor. I have poured everything I own into this plantation. Borrowed a great deal of it from friends in Jamaica. Now it is almost time to 'render unto Caesar' as the saying goes. But don't you worry your pretty little head about it. Everything will work itself out."

Beulah came puffing into the library. "Cap'n, you jest gotta do somethin' about her Ladyship."

"What now, Beulah?"

"Fo days now she's been runnin' 'em ragged; fixin' and paintin' and sech, but I'se gotta have ma help some of de time. I kain't git ma work done wid no help," she grumbled. "She is de stubbornest woman I ever did see."

"Why all the extra work? Are we expecting guests?"

"Not dat I knows of. 'Course nobody tells me nuttin' around here anyways," she complained.

Jamie sighed loudly as he climbed to his feet. "I will be right back, Katy. Perhaps you would like to come with me?"

"No. No, thank you," she assured him quickly. "I'll just read some."

Jamie entered his mother's home and was surprised to see all of the furniture pushed to the middle of the floor and covered with sheets.

"What are you doing now, Mother?"

Her voice registered surprise and pleasure, "Jamie! I wanted to surprise you. I suppose Beulah told you; she does have a big mouth sometimes."

"Don't you have enough servants of your own? Beulah says you are using her help also."

"Only because I wanted to get the painting and decorating done quickly to surprise you."

"Are we expecting guests?"

She looked away guiltily. "Why—no, not that I'm aware of," she hesitated. "I just wanted a change, that's all. I have been locked up in this house all winter and half the summer." Her voice grew shrill, "surely you don't expect me to do nothing all the time. I never see anyone or go anywhere. I might as well be back in that convent or in a prison for all that you would care."

"Please, Mother, just calm down. I don't give a damn if you rebuild the whole house. All I did was ask a question."

"Calm down! That's easy for you to say, M'Lord, you have that little piece of baggage over there with which to entertain yourself—"

Jamie watched the change come over her with dread in his heart. Her face seemed to age before his eyes and her eyes turned ice-blue with fury and hate.

"You never think of me, only of yourself. Why don't you take me somewhere or stay with me, if only for a little while? You are always with *her*. I hear you are sleeping with her again. Has she enticed you back to her bed because she thinks you will come to me now that she is getting fat and clumsy?"

"Enough! What I do in my own home is my business. Leave Katy out of it!" He ran his hand through his hair angrily. "My God, Mother, why must we continue this ghastly charade!"

She ran to him and put her hands on his shoulders. "Thomas, take me away from here. I can not bear it any longer. Why don't we go to London? There are parties there

every night—and lights, many, many lights!" she cried excitedly.

"Remember the balls we used to go to? The music and the excitement? Why can't we have the music and excitement anymore? Why must we be stuck back in this God-forsaken wilderness forever?" Tears burst forth, rushing past the pleading eyes, running in rivulets down the expertly rouged cheeks. "Oh, I hate it here! I can't stand it any longer!"

Fighting the frustrations battling inside, Jamie spoke to her in a low, calm voice. "You know this is not the best time of the year to be in London. The heat is unbearable and everyone is taking their leisure in the country as are we, waiting for the weather to cool."

"When the weather cools—will we go to London then, m'Lord?"

Jamie nodded, not knowing what else to do. She would forget this promise also, made under the obligation of expediency. "M'Lady, you are tired. Let me take you to your room. You can lie down and rest."

"Please, no, Thomas—"

"I insist and will hear no more from you on the matter." His hands clenched at his side as he waited for the argument to follow.

"Will you stay with me for a awhile, M'Lord?"

"For awhile," he promised, leading her into the bedchamber. Fully expecting one of her violent outbursts, Jamie was surprised by her docile manner and was more than willing to spend a near lucid interval with her.

Chapter 15

Amanda was with Katy in the library when Jamie returned. The two women were totally engrossed in conversation and failed to hear him enter the room.

"But why is he beating them? There surely must be a reason."

"Mr. Amos don't need no reason. He jist a mean man and gits a lotta pleasure outta other people's miseries."

"How many has he abused like this?"

"Four since Rufus."

Jamie's heavy stride whirled them around to face him.

"Why did you not bring this to my attention, Amanda?" He demanded with cold fury. "Since when does my wife handle the slaves?"

Amanda drew closer to her mistress. "Master, I couldn't find you—"

"But I see you conveniently found your mistress, didn't you? I will not put up with this female conspiracy behind my back!"

"Jamie, there is no conspiracy,—"

He turned anger darkened eyes on his wife. Not since her early days aboard the Hawk had she seen such smoldering rage. The words died on her lips and she reached out with a trembling hand, grasping the quivering brown one seeking hers.

"Start at the beginning, Amanda," the Captain's cutting voice demanded.

"One of de youngin's came ter me dis mornin'. He knowed I was workin' fer Missy now. Mr. Amos done beat his daddy so bad he thought he was goin' ter die. I went over ter his cabin and talked ter 'im. It was George, Master, and y' knows he's always been a good, strong worker. Mr. Amos, he beat him somethin' terrible, 'cause he was sick this mornin'. Dere's some kind'a fever over dere and lots of 'em air down wid it, only Mr. Amos has started pickin' de cotton and nobody kin be sick, he said. So he's takin' the strop ter everybody dat feels poorly or complains."

"How long has this treatment been going on?"

"Ever since I been a little one I kin remember he was mean, sir."

"Why has no one ever reported this to me before?"

"They be afeared of you, sur. Besides y' set sech high regards ter Mr. Amos, no one thought y' would believe dem."

"Why are you so brave now?" he demanded coldly.

Amanda looked at Katy. "Missy wouldn't let anythin' happen ter me, sur."

Seeing the frightened look upon Katy's face, Jamie snickered scornfully and in a low, cruel voice snapped, "Missy has no control over you or any slave. Your treatment lies solely in my hands, girl, and no one else's. Don't either one of you forget it! One upstart at Fortune's Fancy is one too many."

Jamie strode to the window and stood looking out. "Damn!" He socked his fist into his other hand. His mind made up, he turned to Amanda. "Go out back and get

Rufus—someone, as long as it isn't one of the younger lads."

Katy watched her husband angrily pace the floor in front of the window like a caged animal.

Following close on Amanda's returning skirts was Apollo. The young girl's face was glowing with love and happiness. Apollo walked with long, regal strides, knowing well the impression he was making. Jamie stopped abruptly in his pacing, scowling at the preening Negro.

"What are you doing here?"

"Amanda said ya wanted a man fer somethin'." From his arrogant tone of voice Jamie knew he meant he was the only man among the men present capable of doing any job the Master had to offer.

"You seem to be around the house a great deal lately."

"Mammy sent fo' me," the big man replied sullenly.

"After today you spend your time at the dock helping Billy get the ship ready."

"Yassuh." Katy saw anger flash in his eyes before he could hide it.

"And stay away from Amanda. You have done your duty, nothing else is required of you by her. Do you hear me, Amanda?"

Apollo clenched his fists as he kept his head bowed. His heart churned with rage, for the master had never reprimanded him in front of others. There had always been a mutual liking between them and Apollo had never been made to feel inferior before now. Indeed, with his exalted position at the plantation, he had felt quite the opposite, often lording it over the other slaves.

That this white-washed imitation of a man would dare to insult him in front of Amanda was almost more than he could bear. He had already made up his mind to make her his woman. Now he was determined to have her, even if he had to kill this oppressive white devil.

"Apollo! I'm talking to you. Look at me!"

He veiled his eyes and lifted them to meet the angry obsidian gaze in front of him. "I want you to go get Dr.

Denton again. Tell him to bring whatever medicine he has for fever."

"My mammy kin take care of de fever," he grumbled.

"She will need help. Do as I tell you!"

"Yassuh." Apollo turned and hurried down the hall with angry strides.

"Damned nigger is getting out of hand!" Jamie snarled. "Katy, you stay here. Under no circumstances are you to leave this house. Amanda, I don't want you near Katy for awhile. You help in the kitchen—or somewhere else while Beulah and I are gone."

"Why does Amanda have to stay away from me?"

"She said George had the fever and she was with him. I do not know how long I will be gone, but I won't be back until everything is under control."

Chapter 16

Jamie helped Beulah down out of the buggy as Amos hurried toward them.

"Captain, what air ye be doin' here? I heard ye had a accident and was abed."

"Obviously I am well. I received word you were having a little trouble over here."

"Nothin' I kain't handle, Captain."

"I do not think I care for the way you are handling it," Jamie told him coldly.

"I knowed thet breed bitch would go runnin' with tales," Amos grumbled angrily.

"Evidently it is something I should have looked into a long time ago."

"I've always been able ter handle these niggers without botherin' ye befer."

"But the question is, just how do you handle them?"

"Ye ain't never complained about it befer."

"I was not aware that I had anything to complain about. How long have you been abusing my slaves?"

"I ain't never abused 'em."

"Mr. Amos, I am not here to argue the matter!"

"Someone's been spreadin' lies about me," Amos snarled defiantly.

"Call them in from the fields," Jamie commanded coldly.

"But, Captain, there's three or four hours o' light left."

"I don't give a damn if there are twenty-four hours left! Don't make me repeat myself!"

Amos felt a twinge of fear flutter and settle in the pit of his stomach. The cold, glaring scowl and the black raging eyes were not the face of the young man he knew. Here standing before him was a stranger, an unrelenting, merciless stranger. He went quickly to the big bell and rang it loudly.

Soon the puzzled blacks began to move toward the house in twos and threes until they were all gathered in a large group in the center of the barren yard outside their small cabins. A few hardy clumps of grass braved the hard-packed soil, and honeysuckle bushes perfumed the air with their sweet aroma in front of a few of the one-room shanties; each family tended their own garden, but other than those living things all else was cloaked in the brown, fine-powdered dust which even now rose up around nervous, shuffling feet.

"Take off your shirts!"

The Negroes looked at one another in confusion then at the rigid and taut-nerved man glowering at them; one at a time the shirts were removed. Jamie moved behind them, examining each slave. Beulah moved beside him, checking them for chills and fever.

"Beulah, you pick out a cabin and examine the females."

When each buck had been checked Jamie returned to stand in front of Amos Woodruff. "How do you explain the new welts on the backs of those four men?"

"Disobedience, laziness and a couple o' other infractions o' yer rules," Amos retorted defensively.

"Almost all of these men have been whipped within the last year."

"Thet be the way I keep my discipline."

"I will have no more beatings unless I order it, have I made myself clear?"

"Ye be tyin' me hands, Captain."

"If you are not careful, I will tie your neck—to a tree," Jamie snarled through clenched teeth. He moved off toward the cabin where Beulah had taken the wenches.

"Yer'll be sorry fer this, Captain. Wait and see," Amos threatened under his breath.

Inside the cabin Jamie watched as the women dropped the tops of their homespun dresses to reveal their backs to Beulah. Jamie stood unaffected as female after female flesh was exposed to him. The women parading in front of him appeared shy and embarrassed to be baring their brown and black-hued bodies to him, and clutched their dresses tightly against their bosoms.

He heard one of the young girls whisper loudly, "Look at 'im, we're de same as cattle ter 'im. He ain't noticed one of dem, but he'll notice me. Jist y' wait and see."

She swung her hips seductively, her large breasts jiggled beneath her tight fitting dress. Unbuttoning each button slowly, caressing each one with her long, slim fingers, she looked up at the master through her lashes with a half smile on her lips.

Jamie's eyes narrowed, his teeth clamped tightly, grinding against each other, the right jaw bone protruded convulsively.

"Git over here, you little hussy!" Beulah tried to reach her with her hand.

Jamie's fist shot out suddenly, holding the ham-like black hand in a tight, painful grip.

"Wait!" he growled. "What is your name, girl?"

"Carey, Master." The girl smiled, pleased at his attention. The smile widened as the dress slipped off her shoulders and

fell to the floor, revealing soft, glistening mahogany skin. Her breasts were full and high. The carmine nipples taut and hard. Her stomach firm and flat, terminating in a triangle of black, tight curling hair. Her long legs were slender and shapely.

The master's eyes traveled up and down the inviting body slowly, obviously enjoying what he saw. She ran the tip of her moist, pink tongue across the full lips, as she watched him enticingly with her large, brown eyes.

Jamie stood with hands on hips and legs spread apart, watching her seductive invitation and felt a tightening in his loins. He heard a low, husky laugh escape as her eyes moved to his tight-fitting breeches. She watched the change taking place there. Anger flashed in his dark eyes and a mocking smile crossed his lips.

"Very nice," he drew the words out slowly as he eyed her with a dark, sardonic inspection. "Something this nice deserves the best, don't you agree, Beulah?" he asked maliciously. "See that Adam visits her tonight! Next!"

The girl gave a loud screech and flung herself at Jamie. Her wild, flinging hands connected with his broken ribs and he doubled over, gasping with pain. She swung at him again and he caught her wrist in one hand and back-handed her with the other.

"Hold still, you little bitch," he panted.

"What's de matter, *Master*, is a black woman too much fer yo?" she hissed.

Beulah grabbed Carey by the hair and dragged her screaming and kicking to the other side of the room. She slapped the frenzied woman into submission and talked to her until she quieted down and then helped her dress and sent her home.

Jamie sat in a chair holding his sides with his arms clasped across his protesting middle, trying to get air back into his lungs.

"Cap'n, air yo' all right?"

He nodded slowly, not moving. "Go on with the women, Beulah, I'll just sit here for awhile."

"Now that I finally got the quinine into the darkies and have you convinced that their fever will dissipate, could I please take a look at those ribs?" Josiah asked Jamie.

The Captain nodded. His face was pinched and drawn from the pain.

Josiah helped him out of his shirt. "Where are the bandages I put on you?"

"I took them off. They did not seem to help that much and hindered my movements."

"If I hadn't thought that they would help, I wouldn't have put them on. I've never seen anyone so cussed independent and stubborn."

"Josiah, I wish I knew why I put up with your insubordination." Jamie sighed.

"Because you know I'm not afraid of you and those dark looks of yours." He grinned. "Besides a doctor can get work anywhere. No pay, perhaps, but lots of work. Now lie back and let's see what our problem is."

Jamie fell back against the pillow. Josiah proceeded to examine the broken ribs with his fingertip gently.

Jamie tightened in pain.

"Relax, Captain."

"How can I relax when it feels like you are using knives down there? What instruments from hell are you using?"

"Just my fingers. Now, relax." He touched him again and again. "I can't find any more damage here. You have a couple of fresh bruises, but other than that, nothing new."

"You sound almost disappointed." Jamie growled.

"No, to the contrary. I know they hurt like the devil. Let me put another bandage on you and see if it doesn't feel better. This time will you please leave it on?" he asked in exasperation.

"What did you say the slaves have?" Jamie asked as

Josiah wrapped the bandage around his middle.

"The Indians call it malaria. The medicine comes from the bark of the chinchona tree in Peru. A tribe of Indians I came across in the Yucatan had knowledge of its use. It's ground to a powder and is added to liquid. The results are amazing. I sometimes think that's because it's so bitter; the patient gets well in self-defense, so he won't have to take any more of the horrible stuff. The strange thing about the medicine is that it can be used effectively for the terrible fevers, but is also very harmful. Just a few tiny grains seems to be enough, more than that effects the heart or hearing. Amazing people, the 'ignorant, savage' Indian. Their medicinal knowledge far exceeds our own in some areas, and we're supposed to be the enlightened world."

Jamie grunted in answer as he slid carefully off the bed. "I'll inform Amos that we shall be staying the night here. I am afraid you will have to share my bed, as he only has the one extra room."

"I suppose if you can stand it I can, though I have had more pleasant bedfellows."

"I want you to stay until all the slaves are on their feet and in the fields. The cotton has got to be picked. I can not afford to lose even one bale this year."

"At your service, sir." Josiah bowed.

When Jamie returned, Josiah handed him a drink of brandy. "I took it upon myself to stop at the house and get these, thought we might need them. Hope you don't mind." He held up two bottles of brandy.

Jamie took a drink and held it in his mouth, savouring the smoothness before swallowing. The brandy left a warm glow as it spread through him. "You are correct, Doctor. I needed this. God, what a day," he sighed and sat down. "I think I shall get drunk. If this head of mine gets any larger, it will split open. And if I am going to have a headache, I might as well do something to deserve it."

"That sounds like a clear case of common sense to me," the doctor agreed.

Jamie poured another drink and downed it in one gulp, then refilled his glass and the doctor's. "I had forgotten how much responsibility this land required and how much strength it sapped out of me. Now I remember why I always fled to the sea."

"But you have done an amazing thing here, sir. I haven't seen many plantations in the islands that produce any better or larger than Fortune's Fancy. And none owned by men your age."

Jamie kept pouring the brandy in him drink by drink. "Oh, yes, I am an amazing fellow all right. I was born a bastard, shunned by mother and father and raised by an embittered old man. I was taught I could have anything I wanted in life as long as I wanted it badly enough to fight for it and conquer it. Reared by a man who had been affronted by the women he deeply loved and who taught me to keep them in their proper places and use them as I wished, he trained me never to reveal my inner feelings if I did not wish to be hurt and indoctrinated me to be strong, hard, selfish and cruel. What you see before you is the finished product of that old man's hatred. Never once did he tell me that he loved me or show affection toward me, yet I know that in his own way he loved me, as I did him. Although before I met my wife I never knew what love was, or could be, for that matter." He turned the near empty glass around and around between his palms staring into it, then giving a short scornful laugh, looked at the doctor who was sitting on the bed. "What the hell—you know, Doctor, you are correct," he said with a derisive grin, "I am an amazing fellow, one who is also becoming very besotted." He poured the liquor down his throat and slammed the glass down. "Drink up, Denton, you are dragging your feet."

"Captain, you know, given half a chance we could become a couple of good natured drunks." Josiah extended his glass toward Jamie.

"Do you know, Doctor, you could become a very bad influence on a married man?" The brandy spilled over the

rim of the cup as Jamie's unsteady hand shook drunkenly. Josiah wiped his dripping hand on his pants. "Can't you hold your glass steady, Josiah? We don't want to waste even a drop of this precious brew."

Denton frowned and looked at the tall man with bleary eyes. "My hand is always steady, sir." His voice deepened indignantly, "After all, am I not a doctor?"

"That you are, my good friend, but that does not prevent your hand from shaking."

Josiah extended the hand that held the glass and both men stared hard at the offender.

"Steady as a rock," Josiah assured the Captain.

"Shaking like a leaf," Jamie corrected.

The doctor drained the glass. "One more drink and the rock will definitely stabilize."

Jamie frowned as he watched the bottle move back and forth trying to find the glass. He raised the bottle to his mouth and took a long pull; the fiery liquid worked its magic upon him and he poured the brandy with a steady hand, then raised the bottle to his lips again. Two drops dribbled out of the empty container. Jamie turned it upside down but it was quite empty.

"Well, so much for that bottle." He began to search the room for the other one.

"Captain, I believe you will find we have imbibed both bottles of that fine English brandy of yours." Josiah slurred the words.

"Doctor, I not only believe you are correct, but I also believe you are drunk," Jamie mumbled then passed out.

Josiah helped the Captain into bed and fell across him. He crawled over the unconscious man to the other side of the bed. "Here lie two drunken fools," he thought just before falling asleep.

The sun blazed through the window piercing Jamie's closed eyes with its scarlet-orange daggers. He moaned and

threw his arm across his eyes. The added pressure only intensified the ache in his head.

"Don't groan so loudly," Josiah complained.

"Lord, how can a person go to bed feeling so good and wake up next morning wishing he were dead?" Jamie sat on the side of the bed holding his throbbing head. He pushed himself up and staggered over to the commode. Pouring cold water from the ewer into the basin, he stuck his head into it. He groped for a towel, which Josiah put into his hand.

"Does that help any?"

"Some, at least for awhile," Jamie answered, running the towel gingerly over his wet hair.

"How do you drink as much as you do and still move around the next day?"

"Practice, Doctor, practice, and gritting my teeth very tightly."

Josiah rummaged through his medical bag.

"Do you have to jangle those jars so loudly?" When no answer returned to his complaint and the loud noise still penetrated his throbbing head, he peered at the bag. "What are you after?"

"I have some powder here somewhere that works miracles on drunks the likes of us. Where is—Ah, yes, here it is." He triumphantly held up a small vial with some pale green grains in it.

He poured a half glass of water into their cups and sprinkled a few grains of the powder into it. "Pardon the finger," he told the captain as he stirred the liquid. "Say goodbye to your headache and drink it down quickly."

Jamie did as he was told. When the medicine settled at the pit of his stomach a chill shook him from head to toe violently. Josiah guffawed loudly at the grimace on his Captain's face, then downed his doctored drink also.

Breakfast was strained and quiet. The men ate without conversation. Amos' wife moved on silent feet. A small,

timid woman who worked in quiet fear, she hovered in the background anticipating their unspoken needs.

"Amos, I shall go with the doctor and check on the slaves that are down with the fever. I will meet you later in the fields. I want this cotton picked and baled within two weeks."

"Yes, sir," the overseer replied sullenly.

Josiah followed Jamie outside and they crossed to the first cabin. The hard ground around the cabins was the red soil that the doctor found so unusual. A few weeds poked up bravely through the hard-packed earth. A few scraggly honeysuckles grew between some of the cabins. The grey weathered wood gave the small hovels a depressing atmosphere. Each small abode was a copy of the preceding one: one large, cheerless room, with a dirt floor. Most of the inhabitants had done nothing to brighten their drab existence and an overwhelming sense of discouragement and lost hope lingered in the air. Josiah emerged from the glum dwelling into the sunlight feeling as if a distressing load had fallen upon his soul. He looked at the master of Fortune's Fancy to see if the same sense of defeat affected him, but there appeared to be no change in him.

As they were about to enter one of the cabins, they heard a loud crash, as if something heavy had been thrown against the wall next door. A loud smack sounded as flesh connected with flesh, followed by a scream of pain. Then a yelp from a man's throat and the door burst open.

A large man came bounding out of the cabin. Josiah noted he was well over six feet tall and weighed about sixteen stone with a powerful physique. Every muscle and sinew attested to perfection. He was busily trying to shove his legs into his white, cut-off trousers, hopping on one foot and then on the other, finally pulling the pants up around his hips and tying the laces.

"Git out and stay out, you Nigger stud! Ruttin' season in dis here cabin was last night, not fo' when you jist happens ter git around t' it," the girl yelled shrilly. She stood in the

doorway stark naked, with a heavy pan in her hand. Her full bosom rose and fell in anger. Her skin was a rich mahogany hue and Josiah saw matched perfection in the woman as in the man.

"De Master sent me here t' yo, now yo jist let me back in der," Adam demanded angrily.

"De Master be damned! He ain't any mo' of a man den yo air. He's scared t' come and do da job hisself and yo won't come t' do it unless yer sent. Both of you be damned!"

"Carey, if'en I have t' bust yo haid again, I will. But I'se comin' back inter dat cabin."

"Den yo better bust ma haid good dis time, Adam, cause I'll kill yo if'en yo comes in here agin," she hissed.

Jamie stepped from behind the honeysuckle bush which screened him from the arguing Negroes. Josiah followed.

"What is the trouble here, Adam?" he asked harshly.

"Mammy told me yo wanted me over here t' bed Carey."

"That was last night."

"Wal—uh—I had somethin' else t' do last night, sir," he stammered.

"And you thought you could sneak over here this morning and I would be none the wiser."

"Yas, sir." The Negro dropped his head to his chest.

"And you, Carey, I thought you were hot for a man, so I ordered the best of the lot for you. Did you change your mind?" he asked coldly.

She drew herself up brazenly and moved into the light and looked at him defiantly. "No, sur, I told you de man I wanted."

"As Master here I will pick the man most suited to your needs," he told her sternly.

"How do yo know my needs, Master?" She mimicked his tone of voice.

Jamie's eyes flashed.

"Shut yo' mouth, you hussy!" Adam commanded.

"Adam, you will take Carey inside and do what you were sent to do. If you have any trouble at all let me know and I

will stand over the two of you with a buggy whip until my orders are fulfilled." He told them in cold, clipped words. His anger-filled eyes never left the girl.

"And if you are not pregnant in a month, the two of you will not leave that cabin until you become so."

"There'll be no trouble outer her now, Cap'n," Adam said taking her roughly by the arm. Carey glared her hatred at all of them. She turned on her heel, flipping her bare bottom at them in defiance.

Josiah chuckled.

"What do you find so amusing?" Jamie demanded.

"That is some woman. Are you sure Adam doesn't need any help? I'd be glad to offer my services since you won't oblige her. Are you sure you're not man enough, or is she correct in assuming you're afraid?"

Jamie turned on him angrily and saw the amusement in his friend's eyes. "You're damned right I am afraid. Temptation or no, Katy would break my head open," he grinned. "I will have to get rid of her though, she is too independent."

"When you do perhaps I'll buy her. I like them a little independent. Damn, Captain, you do have some beautiful women about the place, black and white."

They moved from cabin to cabin, Josiah informing Jamie who was well enough to work and who was indolent.

"They should all be on their feet in three or four days. The bad thing about this kind of fever is that it recurs from time to time."

"Well, at least they will be well enough in a few days to harvest the crop. I need all the help I can get. I want the Falcon on the high seas by the first of September and the Hawk at her heels."

"You sound somewhat desperate."

"Well, maybe not desperate, but the next thing to it, I suppose. My notes on Fortune's Fancy are due in the spring. That is the reason I am selling the cotton and tobacco in

Jamaica this year. I won't make nearly the same profit as I would sending it to England, but I shall get the money sooner and Talmadge and Sons is buying as much as I can get to them. Billy will make two trips with the Falcon. I'll request Sir Henry to issue me another authorization for the Falcon, so Billy can have a try at the Dons. Mr. Cruse will finish with the goods and with the Hawk's letter-of-marque he can try his luck. He will also take the booty we took from Don Afredo back to Jamaica and sell it, then pay everyone off."

"We haven't needed it since getting here. Maybe the best things in life are for the asking. At least, they have been for me since I signed on the Hawk. I may just want to buy me a few acres and settle down here one day soon."

"When you make up your mind, just let me know. We would be glad to have you for a neighbor."

Josiah returned to Hawk's Lair after all the slaves were back in the fields. Jamie spent from daylight until dark driving and pushing them all constantly. A dark premonition filled him and he prodded everyone with threats and angry oaths.

The fields were white with the opened bolls. Except for a skeleton crew from the tobacco farms, he ordered all the blacks to work the cotton, and they moved across the fields, stripping the ripened plants clean. They were halfway through the crop when some friendly Creek Indians showed up one day begging tobacco. Jamie was told that the mountains had been getting heavy rains and it was slowly moving toward the coast. From that moment on there was no rest for anyone. They were all in the fields before daylight and left only when it was too dark to see. Even the crews of the Hawk and Falcon found themselves moving alongside the blacks pulling at the white fluffy balls, cursing under their breaths as they jerked the infernal bolls off, stuffing them into the pouches around their necks.

"If the damned cotton all became ripe at the same time it would not be so discouraging. We have to keep going back

time and time again picking the same field to make sure we get it all. If we can only strip the fields before the rains come—”

The hope died on his lips as the unspoken results of failure were mirrored in his worried face. Katy longed to be able to help him in some way.

She sat in the buggy and watched the long lines of men and women moving across the field. They crept across the wide expanse like a horde of locusts, leaving behind the green, broken refuse which had dominated their waking hours with aching backs and unceasing exhaustion all spring and summer.

Jamie moved alongside his crew, pulling and stuffing the balls of down into his own pouch. Suddenly he stopped and searched the western skies. His body stiffened and Katy held her breath and listened. One at a time the labourers ceased their tasks, straightened and listened. In the distance could be heard the ominous, deep rumble of thunder. The thunderheads thickened and darkened. With anguished heart, Katy watched them roll and tumble in their eagerness to reach the lowlands.

As Rufus clucked the horse forward, Katy saw frantic hands pull at the white balls, stuffing the cotton rapidly into their cloth bags. Soon the rains came, splashing and splattering everything in its path. Everyone ran for the shelter of the barn nearby, trying to protect their precious loads.

Jamie stood at the door of the barn and watched the rain destroy the rest of his crop. Anger and frustration boiled in his heart as each cotton ball sagged on the bush, then dropped off into the mud. The ground was soon covered with the small white balls, giving it a wintry appearance.

Katy found him that night in the library. Standing in the doorway, she sensed that the warm feeling she had always felt here was missing. There was an ill-boding spirit present

making her uneasy. Yet on careful inspection all appeared the same.

She heard the clink of glass. An open brandy decanter stood on the liquor cabinet.

"Jamie?" she entered hesitantly.

Receiving no answer, she called again softly, "Jamie?"

"Do not just stand there, close the door and come in," came an impatient voice, slightly slurred.

She walked over to the fireplace and faced him. He sat slumped in the heavy chair with a half-filled glass in his hand. The chair seemed dwarfed by his size. He still wore the black, mud splattered breeches. From the waist up he was naked. In the dim, flickering candlelight his deeply tanned chest gleamed. The black mat of hair rose and fell slowly. At her disapproving gaze, he scowled.

Through half-closed lids he observed her with an intolerant eye. Her small hand clutched the blue robe nervously at her throat. At the waist her swelling belly pushed the silken cloth outward, revealing the creamy whiteness of her thighs. Her hair fell loosely to her hips catching the flickering candlelight, appearing to be a cascading flame in the dim light. Beneath her eyes, dark shadows marred the ivory beauty, revealing the lack of sleep in her concern for him. He had pushed himself day after day in a frenzy to gather all of the cotton. His nature had reverted back to the cold, ruthless days when she had first known him. In his desperation to save the plantation, he had pushed everyone away from him in the anger and panic of defeat, using his sharp tongue as a ready weapon. Standing beneath his disapproving glower she felt a sense of distress steal across her.

"Don't just stand there criticizing me with that arrogant demeanour, dammit! Sit down and have a drink, it will take some of that starch out of your back."

"I don't care for any, thank you."

"Then just sit down, I don't want anyone lording anything

over me tonight." His voice sounded thick with liquor and self-pity.

"Come to bed, Jamie," she coaxed.

"Why?" he sneered, "do you have something more interesting to offer me there than here?"

"You need rest."

"Rest!" he laughed harshly. "Good Lord, woman, after this spring I shall have all the rest I can stand. Look around you, Katy. See how beautiful it is? Look out the window. For as far as you can see, it is mine. I have worked for nearly ten years to build it. The bastard son doing that which the natural son could not. And just because of a freak rain I shall probably lose it all."

"Are you so deeply in debt?"

"I mortgaged Fortune's Fancy five years ago—to buy the Hawk. The Spaniards sunk my first ship," he lifted the cup to his mouth and drank, "and a pirate must have a ship, y' know, or else he can't go—pirate—go apiratin'—" he took another gulp of brandy—"accounting." He waved his empty glass, then rose and refilled it.

He sat down heavily in his chair and took another drink.

"Can't you sell a few acres to help raise the money you need?"

"Sell some of Fortune's Fancy?" The shock of the inane suggestion cleared some of the stupor away. "Never!"

"You must have something of value to sell. Maybe some of the slaves," she mused, "or I have the jewels you gave me. They must surely be of great value."

He waved the brandy through the air and leered at her. "Ah, yes, my beautiful, beautiful wife and her beautiful, beautiful jewels." He cocked his head to one side and inspected her carefully.

"You are a jewel, my sweet, my jewel, with your emerald eyes and hair the colour of rubies. Maybe I could sell you. Who will buy a pregnant jewel?" he cried.

Clumsily, he staggered to his feet. As he wavered, Katy

reached out to help him. His arms went around her and she held him against her until he steadied himself. The fog seemed to lift from his eyes as mist flees before the sun.

"Ah, Katy, my lovely, lovely Katy. Even now you are a desirable woman. The nights I lie awake thinking about you are agony; wanting you so much I can hardly restrain myself. What is the hold you have on me, my little gem?"

She tried to pull away from him, but his arms tightened around her, claspng her closer. Desire kindled, his lips traveled a searing path upon her face.

"Jamie, don't, please."

"Katy—Katy—" he groaned.

"No, Jamie, please." His impassioned efforts continued. "Not here, not like this. What if Beulah or someone else should enter?" She told him brusquely, shoving against his chest, trying to break his firm grasp.

"Everyone has gone to bed," he growled impatiently as his lips sought hers. Mercilessly his hands persisted their quest.

"Jamie, please, you're hurting me."

"Yes, I know. But it isn't nearly the hurt that rips at my gut because of you, my sweet. Do men really enjoy the agony which woman inflicts upon mankind all in the name of this something called love? Are we really that stupid?" His mouth was hard upon hers once more. "God, Katy, I want you—I need you," he whispered hoarsely. "Yield to me, Katy, yield to me."

No longer protesting nor resisting, she stood stiffly before him. Drawing back abruptly, he looked down at her. His mouth twisted in anger, his eyes glinted darkly. A deep sound rumbled in his throat and he pushed her away. She stumbled backwards. His fingers bit into her arms as he grabbed her. "The least you could do is pretend, my sweet," came his caustic sneer. His shaking hands fumbled at the belt. With an angry cry she tried to push his hands away, but failed. A sudden jerk and the knot untangled and he pulled the robe off. The shirt she wore was twisted around her body.

"Take it off!" he demanded, his voice thick with emotion.

"Jamie, why are you like this when you drink? Can't you come to me with gentleness?"

"At this moment, I don't feel gentle. Take it off—or would it please you for me to rip it from you?"

As she unbuttoned the shirt and let it fall to the floor, his breeches joined the pile. She stood before him rigid and unyielding. He ran his mouth over her ruthlessly, murmuring to her softly in his passion. Pushing her to her knees, he forced her to the floor. She offered no resistance, almost as if she were ignoring his nearly violent desires. It was as if a part of her departed from this demon part of the man she called husband. She remained passive and submissive under this thrusting, lusting offender.

Even after he had thrust himself away from her, Katy lay quietly with closed eyes. She had no desire to move. She felt drained and exhausted. Her heart ached with an unexplained sadness and emptiness. She felt the need to weep, but was unsure whether the tears would be for herself or Jamie. When she opened her eyes, he was leaning over her. His eyes were dark wells of regret. He took her hand gently.

"Katy, forgive me. I don't know what came over me. Did I—hurt you?"

"No," she replied tonelessly, "you didn't hurt me." She drew away from him. "May I have my robe, please?" She put it on, drawing it tightly around her.

"My God, what is the matter with me?" The sting of remorse darkened his features, outlining them sharply in the dim light. "I must be going mad."

"I agree, m'lord." Her voice was cold and tight with restrained anger.

"What would you have me do, go around flailing myself with a whip as do those black-robed monks and making a vow of chastity?" he snarled.

"No, rather a vow of controlled passion."

"Am I expected to control my passions around my wife also?" he asked sarcastically. "In case you have not noticed,

I have managed to keep my wandering Bartlett hands to myself, though it grows more difficult every day. I was cut from the wrong material for this self-denial business."

"Jamie, I love you. You can have me anytime you desire me. But I think I deserve gentleness and respect. I could have been one of the Negroes out in the field just then. It wouldn't have mattered to you. You used me as an act of revenge against heaven only knows what. Against nature for sending the rain or against God; I don't know your motives, but I will never let myself be used again."

He grabbed her chin roughly. "I will use you as I see fit! There is naught that you can do about it, my sweet. You are my wife—remember? My own personal property. I own you now, as you once thought I did. Does that thought upset you now as it once did?"

"I am your wife, but not your slave, nor your whore, to be commanded. I obey the law only up to a point. I will not be a slave to you or to anyone."

"You will be whatever I want you to be. Do not give yourself airs, madam, that do not come with the title of wife." His hands clasped her by the shoulders tightly, and he gave her a rough shake.

She struggled beneath his cruel grasp, "I think you are disgusting, not to mention drunk. Please release me."

"You are correct, my sweet, I am very drunk, but a Bartlett is never disgusting." He pulled her to him and kissed her savagely. She broke away from him and turned her face away.

"I know someone who would not turn away from me," he whispered fiercely.

"Then go to her, perhaps she can fulfill your barbaric needs," Katy retorted angrily.

He shrank back on his heels aghast, his face clothed in disbelief. "By God, I will!" He stood up and jerked on his breeches.

Hesitating, he waited for her to deny him leave to go, or to show some sign of denial. She sat at his feet, her head

forward, her hair hiding the silent tears.

"Yes, by damn, I will go! Goodnight, madam, may you enjoy the comforts of your cold, empty bed. It only matches that which you carry within your breast; which I believe you call a heart."

Katy heard the door slam and soon a horse galloped into the rain drenched night. Slowly sinking to the floor, she cried, the harsh sobs racking her body.

The cold downpour failed to cool Jamie's burning ire. He gouged at the horse's flanks with his bare feet. The wind ripped through his hair and seemed to intensify the ferocity inside him. The cool night air rang with angry oaths that he had not uttered since his feet had touched terra firma, oaths and blackly muttered thoughts that seemed at home only on the open deck of a ship. His mind overflowed with ugly thoughts of the events of his disastrous day. He arrived at his destination drenched.

Throwing himself off Diablo, he slapped the quivering flanks, pausing only long enough to see the black devil head for the open door of the barn. He strode across the yard toward the dimly lit cabin and pounded on the door. The closed barrier opened slowly, cautiously. Shoving the door open, he pushed inside. The candlelight flickered and danced against the girl's skin. He stood in the open doorway watching her through slitted, storm-hued eyes, taking in the deep rich coffee colour of Carey's skin. A sly, satisfied smile crossed her lips as she backed up, inviting him in.

With a low growl he put his hands on her shoulders and pushed her backwards towards the bed, slamming the door shut with his foot.

"Now, you brown hussy, prove to me how much woman you think you are," he snarled.

A throbbing headache woke Jamie out of a deep sleep. A soft arm was thrown across his chest. He turned and encircled a slender waist and his hand moved upwards, cupping the firm, full breast. A nagging uncertainty opened his eyes to a slit. He saw a sun-browned hand fondling a

chocolate-hued breast and a second passed before the thought registered on his throbbing, clouded mind.

He threw himself to the side of the bed and looked back at Carey. "What in the hell are you doing here?" His eyes turned a full circle of the small one-roomed cabin.

The furniture was sparse and austere, only the bare necessities were visible. The floor was packed-down earth, yet everything was clean and tidy. He noticed the small room had none of the comforts he had taken for granted all his life.

"Where am I?" he demanded, his head buried deeply in his hands.

"Y'all came poundin' on my door last night, *Master*, and fourced yo' way in." She told him with disdain, watching him through veiled eyes.

"What do you mean, I forced my way in?" he snarled, guilt pricking his conscience.

"Jist that. I mean yo was drunk and yo fourced y're way in."

"And then what?"

"And everythin' yo had planned from de very beginnin' happened, *Master*."

As he reached for his breeches beside the bed, she laughed with a low, husky mirth.

"What do you find so amusing, slut?"

"You told me ter prove to yo how much woman I really am last night. I did. Yo'll be back ter sample it agin," she smirked.

"Don't count on it. Last night I was drunk and angry, don't read any more into this episode than there is, bitch." He shoved his feet into his breeches furiously. His foot kicked an empty bottle which rolled under the bed, clinking loudly against another one. Standing he jerked his pants up over his hips, fastening them.

Carey smiled at the white man, amused at his anger and guilt. He hurled himself across the dirt floor, cursing silently and slammed out of the house. Just before the door banged shut, Carey's laughter ripped through the stillness of the

morning air. Jamie marched to the barn and swung himself onto the still saddled horse. Muttering savagely to himself, he rode toward the house.

The curtains parted furtively and hostile eyes watched him. A malicious leer crossed Amos Woodruff's harsh face. "So the great Captain Bartlett drops his breeches at any female's door too, eh? Like father, like son, as they say," he muttered scornfully, tucking the information away inside his memory in case he should ever find need of it.

"Damned drunken fool!" Jamie grumbled. "What have you done?"

He tried to search his memory of the night before. All he could remember was arguing with Katy and rushing out of the house, everything else hid behind dull shadows and an aching, throbbing head. His stomach seemed to rise and fall with the motion of the horse. On arriving home, he gratefully stepped down and turned the reins over to Rufus and stumbled up the steps into the house.

Through bleary eyes he saw his mother coming down the hall toward him. Cursing silently, he moved to the stairs. In his condition he had no desire to carry on a conversation with anyone this morning.

"Jamie, you are in from the fields early," his mother exclaimed. "My goodness, son, you look terrible. Are you ill?"

"No, Mother, merely the wages of sin. I am going to bed now. Good day," he muttered softly, impatiently.

He took the stairs slowly, trying not to jar his head. "Going to have to give it up. Can not hold my own with that nigger hootch at all any more," he thought.

Stumbling over the last step, he staggered down the hall. Hesitating, he leaned against the wall; his eyes sought the bedroom door uncertainly. Sweat beaded at his forehead from the turmoil in his stomach. Taking a deep breath, he started toward the door again. His hand found the knob and he tried to turn it. The door didn't budge. He tried again, unsuccessfully. He rattled the knob, angrily.

"Katy, unlock this door."

"Go away, Jamie."

"Katy, I do not feel like arguing about it. Open the door!"

He waited, but the only thing that greeted his ears was silence. He turned to go to his own isolated bed, too ill to argue, until he saw his mother watching him from below. The slowly melting anger flared and spread through him.

He rammed his shoulder against the door and felt the wood splinter and give. Another great lunge and the door swung open, banging against the wall. He kicked it shut.

Katy was sitting up in bed with an alarmed expression upon her face.

"Good morning, my sweet." He bowed, smiling at her bitterly. "I am overwhelmed with your enthusiastic greeting." He eyed her darkly. "Did you really think a lock could keep me out?"

"Did you really think I would allow you to come from her bed to mine?" Katy snapped.

"As husband and master here I can go and come from any bed I so choose. You are the one who offered me the comforts of yours."

"I withdraw the offer."

"Which I override," he answered shortly. "I do not intend to argue the point. Move over and lie down." He lay back wearily.

Katy started to get up. Jamie grabbed her wrist. "I said to lie down. I want you beside me, where a wife belongs."

"I am not tired."

His grip tightened on her wrist as he pulled her down beside him. "I said, Lie down!"

"You are contemptible, sir."

"Yes, I know. I could not agree with you more," he sighed. "Please, try not to shake the bed. Somewhere between losing a night and gaining a hangover, I have also inherited a headache that is without doubt the father of them all."

Between the mental strain and the physical labour, with which Jamie had been burdened, exhaustion soon overcame

the throbbing head and queasy stomach and he dropped off into a deep sleep.

Katy lay beside him, studying him with mixed emotions. Where had he spent the night, she wondered? Had he been alone or with someone? She didn't know whether she wanted the answers to those questions.

The following days found Jamie at the cotton mills where he watched the Negroes separate the cotton fibers from the seeds by hand. It was a slow, tedious job. To Jamie's anxious eye, it seemed to take forever. He could feel the anxiety gnawing at him and his temper smoldered on a short fuse as he moved from one shed to another.

After the cotton was separated, it moved on to be compressed into bales, then to the storage sheds on the wharf to await loading. As the sheds filled Jamie's impatience abated somewhat. There was more cotton than he had estimated, yet it still rankled him to see the fields covered with the lost crop.

Billy stood beside him on the dock. "We kin start loadin' anytime, sir."

"Good. This is one crop I want you to barter your heart out for, Billy. If only I could come with you. Damn! Do babies always come at an inconvenient time?"

Billy looked at the Captain, surprised at the impatience he found in his voice and on his face. The thunderous scowl had once more become a familiar sight. Billy wondered what had caused the Captain to revert to the old ways.

"Is there ever a convenient time fer a wee one? Seems like they always come at a time when they be unneeded 'r unwanted."

"Nonsense, he is wanted. It is just that I feel I should go to Jamaica and protect my merchandise. All that is mine is riding on this crop. Ten years of my life rests in your hands. Josiah feels that Katy will have a hard time in her delivery, so I must stay behind."

"Then it's best ye be stayin' with the Mistress, sir. After all, it be yer wee one too."

Jamie sighed. "Aye, he is mine too." His voice lowered. "You know, Billy, marriage is not the picture of contentment that people lead one to believe. Too many restrictions, too many ties. I am afraid all my carefree days of irresponsibility, going where I want to go, doing what I want to do are over." He gazed at the ship and the water wistfully. "It was a good life."

"Aye," Billy agreed.

Jamie squared his shoulders and forced a grin, "But not the end of the world though. Why are we so sad, mate? We shall go to sea together again." He clapped his friend on the shoulder.

"Now don't ye be frettin', I'll take care o' the cargo as if it be me own."

"I know you will, Billy. When you return the tobacco should be ready to ship, then you can have your stab at the Dons."

"We kin hardly wait, sir. The Falcon is a sturdy and willin' lady. One thing I kin say about the Dons, they know how to build a seaworthy vessel."

The two sat on the bales of cotton and watched the cargo being loaded. The block and tackle groaned and creaked from the weight of the heavy loads. As each bale was lowered into the bowels of the ship, Jamie felt a personal satisfaction and reassured himself that all would be well.

Two days later the Falcon pulled up anchor and loosed her sails to the open sky. The canvas caressed the winds and billowed out, rivaling the white, downy clouds that dotted the azure sky. Then the ship surrendered herself to the embrace of the open waters.

Jamie felt a catch in his throat as he watched the Falcon slowly move across the bay. Long after the ship had disappeared he stood watching the empty waves.

He was surprised to find a small hand slip into his. Not

since the morning he had returned from Carey's side had she spoken to him. He had been too engrossed in getting the cotton ready to ship to be concerned with her coolness. He knew her well enough now to know that when her hurt was over she would once more turn to him in warmth and love.

"It was a beautiful sight. Made me want to call her back and go with them," she whispered.

"Aye."

"My poor Jamie. That is where you really belong you know, on the quarterdeck with your eye to the glass. Dressed in those horrible cut off breeches of yours, a white shirt opened to the waist and your hair blowing in the wind."

He grinned. "Madam, you make me sound like a—"

"Like a pirate, my love? Of course, that is what you are at heart, you know. I have done the hawk a terrible injustice—" he raised his brow. "By tethering him." She smiled up at him. Her emerald eyes sparkled with amusement.

"Do you think that rapacious plunderer would remain tethered if he did not receive pleasure from that captivity?" He squeezed her hand. "Not angry with me any more?"

"I realize I should be, but I just can't bottle it up inside me and keep it as you do. I know I shall always be the one to heal the breach between us and if that makes you happy, that is all that I care about."

He drew her close. "I wish the words 'I'm sorry' came easy to my tongue, but—"

"Sh-h." She placed her fingers across his lips. "Don't, Jamie, it isn't necessary."

He clasped her hand and kissed the soft fingers still lying lightly against his mouth, lowering his head he kissed her.

"Jamie, everyone is watching us," she whispered.

His forehead wrinkled as he raised his brow and looked around at the watching, grinning black and white faces. His mouth curved in a wry grin and he whispered in return, "Shall I demand that they cease their labours and find another task to occupy their time? After all, my love, for days

I have growled at them like a bear with a sore paw to keep busy and get this job completed. Besides, don't we owe it to them to put all doubts about us to rest?"

Her smile coaxed the dimples from their hiding places at the corners of her pink mouth. "Aye, love. Also my own." She raised a radiant face to his smiling one.

Chapter 17

September was a hectic month for Fortune's Fancy. Everyone worked from dawn to dusk to finish baling the cotton and loading the Hawk for its trip to Jamaica, before turning their attention to the tobacco.

More complaints reached Jamie's ear about added unrest on Amos Woodruff's farm, but at the moment he was too busy to investigate them.

Also, he was worried about Katy. She was listless and he was sure she was in pain, though she denied it. She had gotten so laden she rarely came down from their rooms now. When the opportunity presented itself he ate the mid-day meal with her, but he rarely got a chance to see her awake, for many times she was asleep when he went to bed late at night and when he left early in the morning.

The rising sun usually found him working alongside the slaves, pushing himself as hard as he did them. He closed his ears to the grumblings and complaints of everyone around him until he could take it no longer and raising his voice in

cold anger, threatened to beat them or sell them or worse. Sullenly and silently, they returned to their labours. The field echoed with the harsh thud of the sharp blades slicing at the thick tobacco stalks. Gone were the easy good spirits which usually rang in the air with the shouts of laughter and banter, accompanied by the soft, mournful harmony of the blacks as they protested their abuse and neglect to God and man upon the wings of deep, resonant song.

As the fiery jewel of the heavens marched slowly across the dome of the sky, the refreshing ocean breath ceased, changing to oppressive waves of sweltering heat. The heavy, sullen atmosphere grated upon his already chafing temper, the thick-bladed cutlass raised and slashed downward hacking at the great stalks angrily. All he wanted to do was to get the tobacco harvested and onto the drying racks and stored to cure, but it seemed as if everything conspired against him. The uncertainty of the cotton crop had started the grappling cycle. And as if that wasn't enough, nature had to join in the struggle. The undercurrent with the blacks had added its burden, plus the ever-present worry over Katy's condition. The blade rose again and again in a disgruntled rhythm. He forced his thoughts to the task ahead.

Last season's tobacco was nearly ready to be packed into hogsheads. After drying on racks, then bundled with a different variety of tobacco to ferment together, the dried, yellow leaves had been left to blend their aromas. Discovering this method in Jamaica several years ago from the planters who had successfully used it, he had been assured that the flavour which this blending produced was highly coveted among the tobacco smokers and found that it brought a higher price. The process took longer but in the end he had found it highly profitable, and at the moment that was his main objective. Above all else Fortune's Fancy must be free and clear of obligation. Under no circumstances would he ever allow outside interference to hinder his control over the vast estate. It annoyed him no end that his father tried now and then to offer suggestions on the

operation of the huge plantation. With great disdain Jamie had pointed out that the time had long since passed that his Lordship had any authority to make any decisions concerning Fortune's Fancy, reminding his sire that it was because of his lack of financial judgment that once before Jamie had nearly lost his tidewater inheritance.

Jamie groaned softly as he straightened up. Leaning his elbow on the hilt of the cutlass he rubbed at the aching muscles in his back with the other hand, while his watchful gaze swept the vast green field. The dark heads of the slaves bobbed up and down among the large, pointed leaves. The black, who had been following him, picking up the huge, ovate foliage cut by the sharp-bladed sword, gathered another armload. He tied them into bundles and tossed them into a cart he was pulling, then paused in his labour also to rest his nagging back.

Both men were dressed for the oppressive heat in pantaloons cut off at the knees, their bodies glistening with sweat. Jamie felt the sticky wetness running down his spine. A quick glance at the descending sun brought to mind welcoming thoughts of a warm bath to relieve the persistent ache gnawing at his back.

"Sho am hot, sir." A wide grin creased the black face as the big man drew his arm across his forehead.

Jamie grunted in answer, wiping his face also.

"We should be finished wid dis field by termorrow."

"There is no 'should be' about it, Cully; we will be finished here tomorrow," Jamie snapped.

"Yas, sur."

In silence, they returned to their back-breaking work.

Jamie climbed the stairs that evening groaning at nearly every step. His back, legs and arms ached from the bending and cutting he had done in the fields all day. He looked forward to soaking his aches and pains away in the hot bath he had ordered.

On entering the bedchamber he found Katy lying awake.

Her face was blanched marring the flawless, creamy complexion. Dark circles enlarged her eyes against the pallid skin. Sluggish viridescent shadows dimmed the depths of the emerald pools. The pale lips were drawn tightly together.

- Plopping down in a nearby chair, he observed her closely, frowningly. "Katy..." he asked softly, "are you all right?"

She nodded her head listlessly, offering a slight smile to put his mind at ease. "You look so tired. Must you work so hard? Can't the darkies do it instead?"

"It is my land. I enjoy working it. But I am deathly tired." He sighed deeply. "Where is that water?" he asked impatiently.

A rap sounded at the door. "Come in, come in," was his agitated invitation.

Calab and Rufus entered carrying in large buckets of steaming water. After emptying the water into the brass tub in the corner, Rufus reentered, carrying two buckets of cold water.

"Be careful, I don't want the water cold. I need to soak the soreness out. I must be getting old, I hurt everywhere," he complained.

"Yas, sur, Cap'n."

Jamie started stripping his clothes off before the two servants left the room.

"Yo want fer me ter help yo, Cap'n?" Calab called.

"No, no, just go about whatever you were doing," he answered impatiently, "I may be in here for awhile." He settled himself into the steaming water slowly, feeling the warmth melt away the tension and soothe away the taut, stiff muscles. He released a deep sigh as he settled against the back of the tub.

Katy appeared to be asleep, so he lay back and soaked. Just as he was about to drop off to sleep, a scream jolted him awake. Confused for a second, thinking had he dreamt the ear-splitting cry, he sat up, blinking sleep out of his eyes. Then Katy moaned as if in intense pain.

Jumping out of the tub, he ran to her side. "Katy, darling,

what is it?" Anxiety sharpened his voice.

"Jamie, the baby—" she moaned. Her eyes were frenzied with fright and pain.

"He isn't due for another month!"

She moaned again and held her stomach. Now convinced that the baby was unaware of the day of his prescribed arrival, Jamie pulled breeches on over wet, dripping legs. Jerking them up over his buttocks, he stumbled toward the door, wrenching it open savagely, "Beulah!" His voice was hoarse. "Beulah! Where are you?" he yelled, pulling his pants the rest of the way up and fastening them. "Dammit, Beulah, answer me!"

"Yas, sir, Cap'n. I'se a-comin'," she called pulling her heavy bulk up the stairs with the help of the railing. "What's de matter?"

"It's Katy—the baby! Hurry!"

"What's dat little rascal doin' comin' so early?"

Jamie hurried into the bedroom. Katy was on her side with her knees drawn up and the quilt clutched tightly.

"Help me, Beulah, oh God, help me!"

"Easy, chile, Beulah's here. Dere, dere, honey chile." She patted the terrified girl tenderly. "Cap'n, you get out o' here now. Dis is no place fo' a man. Dis is wimmin's work. Get Calab ter start some water heatin' and Matilda ter findin' dos bandages we fixed and you go do whateber it is dat menfolks do when dey waits fer babies."

Jamie backed out of the room reluctantly. He had just reached the door when another cry was ripped out of his wife's throat. Lunging out into the hall he stood with his back stiff against the wall, eyes closed and sweat beading his forehead.

"Dere, dere, Missy. Now yo just straighten out here and soon we'll have sompthin' fer yo ter pull on. Cap'n, where is yo?"

Beulah shuffled to the door. She found Jamie leaning against the wall. He turned dark eyes full of worry on her.

Her voice softened, "De Missy goin' ter be all right, sur. Don't yo be worryin', Beulah'll tak good keer of my little honey chile. Now yo go do what I tells yo to do." She patted his arm and moved back into the room. He could hear Katy moaning and crying softly.

Jamie left with misgivings and apprehension. All of the house servants were gathered at the bottom of the steps. As he descended, they turned eyes full of concern upward.

"Calab, Matilda, Beulah wants hot water and bandages immediately. Calab, send Rufus for Doctor Denton."

"But Mammy's..."

"Beulah is going to need some help. Do as I tell you!"

"Yas, sir."

Jamie headed for the library. He secluded himself behind closed doors with his head in his hands, nursing a dreadful feeling of helplessness.

He was pouring a drink when Katy cried out again. Downing the drink he braced himself against the heavy oaken cabinet and bowed his head.

"So the bitch is about to whelp?"

The cold, impersonal voice cut through his anguished mind like a dull blade. He glanced over his shoulder, his inner turmoil veiled behind a dark scowl. "I am in no mood for your games tonight, madam!" he told her frigidly.

"Come, my Lord, we have been through these hard times before, but I must say you have never ever shown this much concern for one of your other hussies. This one must be somewhat special to you," she retorted acidly. "But then, we have never had one of them living under the same roof with us either."

He poured another brandy. His ebony eyes bored into the shards of blue ice glaring at him. Sipping at the amber liquid, he endeavoured to quell the fury raging through him.

"Is that all men can do when women are going through the pangs of hell for them? Block it out by numbing the brain with liquor? A few moments of ecstasy for you becomes pine

months of hell for the woman—and me. Don't you care about the agony you cause both of us?" Her voice rose shrilly.

Jamie opened his mouth to rebuke the deranged woman, but a groan of anguish thwarted the acrimonious answer. He whirled away from her with an oath, slamming the crystal goblet down on the cabinet. The goblet shattered in his hand and blood ran between his fingers. "Shut up! I am your son, not your husband and that is my wife up there!" Picking up a serviette from the back of the cabinet he wrapped it around his hand.

The strange glint in her eyes brightened. "I can forgive you for your adulteries, M'Lord. But we will see what the court has to say about bigamy. There is a law forbidding it you know, and as soon as we get back to London I shall inform them." Her voice trembled with suppressed anger.

"God in heaven!" he cursed, "you *are* mad!" He stood with rigid back and clenched fists, his eyes closed against the torment buffeting him from within. Overriding the raging storm that assaulted his wounded emotions, he opened his eyes. In a low rasping voice he growled, "I have humoured you these many years, pretending and acting out the obnoxious part given me, but not tonight, Mother. Katy may die tonight from having my child. I will not play your games this night or from now on. I am your son, Jamie, not your husband. Now, please go and leave me alone."

"Oh, M'Lord, please don't send me away again. I can't bear to be parted from you. I love you, I love you." She went down on her knees before him, holding out her hands in supplication.

"Get up, Mother. Stand on your feet!"

"Please, Thomas, say you love me. I can't live without you." Tears drenched her ashen cheeks. She clawed at the outraged man in her anguish.

He jerked her to her feet. "Dammit, woman, pay attention to me," he snarled shaking her savagely.

"M'Lord, please, you are hurting me," she sobbed.

"Sometimes when you get like this I would like to kill you," his lip curled with animosity. Shoving her away roughly, he raged through clenched teeth, "Leave me alone!"

"Why? so you can drown your guilt in brandy?" she chided coldly.

Jamie glared at the deriding woman. It never failed to surprise him when her attitude changed so abruptly. The cringing, begging woman was no more, in her place stood the callous shrew who now and then appeared in the body of the gentle woman he called mother.

The cold fury in her voice cut with an icy bite. "You will never change, M'Lord; for as long as I have known you, you have had only one passion—women! Your libertine ways would put the most prurient rogue to shame. But to bring that slut into my home to bear your bastard is more than even I can abide. As soon as she whelps, get her and her brat out of here!"

The dark eyes grew darker until they glowed with a hellish light. His jaw tightened into a square angle and the lines around eyes and mouth constricted making his face seem a cold, stone mask.

Slowly, her reason returned in waves of increasing coherency. Lady Bartlett tried to recall to mind what had been said or done to cause the abrupt change in her son's attitude toward her, but her mind was a blank. Her eyes searched the room frantically. What was she doing in the library? Why was Jamie facing her with cold fury graven upon his raving countenance? She raised her hand to her heart in fear and moved back away from him. She thought he would strike her. She kept the distance between them as he stalked her, whimpering in fear of him as she retreated before the infuriated stranger.

"No, please, Jamie, don't hurt me... don't hurt me..."

Terror-filled eyes watched the strong hands slowly clench into fists as she continued to flee before the enraged man. A pounding began in her breast and crept into her throat,

swelling with painful spasms. The pounding thundered in her ears and she raised trembling hands upwards, crushing her temples in wild dismay. A sharp cry of panic pierced the close air. She fell on her knees, sobbing in sheer fright, and sank weakly to the floor, burying her face in the soft pile of the carpet.

Common sense having fled before the burning cloud of indignation, the outraged man's ears were blocked to all entreaties. Bereft of all mercy and deaf to all reasoning, he pursued the whimpering, creature who evaded him. He ground his teeth violently, then lunged forward.

Forceful hands grabbed at him, fumblingly. He heard the rending of cloth as the hands closed upon him again, clutching him tightly against a hardened chest.

"Jamie!"

Baring his teeth he snarled savagely, twisting and turning viciously to break the hold upon him. A resounding slap drove the insanity away and he turned in raw fury to the intruder.

"Jamie! For God's sake, man, come out of it!"

He drove his fist into the offender's face, then felt a sharp blow beneath his ribs. They grappled together, knocking over and dislodging everything in their path. Jamie drove Josiah backwards with frenzied blows raining from all directions against the doctor's untutored defenses. Jamie's hands clutched his adversary's throat and tightened slowly. The doctor struggled wildly to break the agonizing grip which was strangling him. Josiah knew he was no match for the maddened strength the Captain now possessed. As the strong hands slowly grew tighter and his throat issued harsh rasping wheezes of desperation, the doctor panicked.

Josiah gave one final frantic thrust with his head, crashing against the Captain's chin, breaking the hold. The strong hands grabbed at him again. Josiah clawed and struck at the demented face and finally yielding to the knowledge of defeat he brought his knee up sharply into the unprotected groin.

With a cry of intense pain, Jamie went to his knees. Every nerve in his body protested against the invasion. Waves of nausea swept over him and he rocked to and fro, gasping for breath, grasping for consciousness.

Josiah leaned against the desk clutching his raw, throbbing throat. The air whistled shrilly as he inhaled and exhaled. His lungs burned as the air finally reached into every empty crevice. The clock on the mantel loudly ticked away each dolorous moment. With the passage of time, their pain began to recede and the two men eyed one another.

Finally Jamie spoke, "Josiah—God—I am sorry—"

The doctor waved the words aside. "I think—I got here in—time, otherwise, it might—have been your mother."

The deep, sharp breaths of the weary men filled the room.

"Mother—" They looked around the library, but she had fled.

"How is Katy?"

"Earlier she was in terrible pain." Jamie shifted his weight back against his heels, wincing at the slight movement. "Can you help her, Josiah?"

"Who's with her?"

"Beulah."

"Will she let me in to see Katy?"

"She will—or else."

"Let's go."

Jamie struggled to his feet. Josiah caught him as he stumbled, "You weren't trying to fix me for good, were you, Doctor?" he asked with a grimace.

"No, just enough to save an important life—mine. What in the world started all this insanity?"

"I was upset about Katy and Mother had to pick this night to play Lord and Lady Bartlett and she said something. We can discuss it later."

"Can you make it now?"

Jamie nodded.

They crossed the room in long strides. Taking the stairs two at a time, they hurried down the hall. Sobs and gasps of

pain penetrated the closed door, followed by Beulah's soft, soothing voice.

Jamie knocked. The midwife's heavy tread crossed the floor, and she opened the door a crack.

"Cap'n, I told ya ter wait downstairs. Missy is still birthin'."

"The doctor is here to see Katy. Let us in, Beulah."

"I is de doctor here. We don't need no more doctors." Beulah frowned in annoyance and started to close the door.

Jamie kicked it out of her hand; she sprang back in fear. "I said the doctor was here to see my wife," he snarled.

"But, Capt'n, I'se always taken care of the midwife'n at Fortune's Fancy," she pleaded.

"Easy, Beulah, you're still in charge. I just want to see what's going on, and how your mistress is getting along." Josiah patted her shoulder.

Her face relaxed with the doctor's assuring words and she followed them across the room to the bed.

The girl's face was pale and wan in the flickering candlelight. She held onto heavy pulling cords as if her life depended upon them. Her nightgown clung to her drenched body and the perspiration stood out in glistening beads against the white skin.

"Josiah, please help me," she implored.

"Can you help the pain?" Jamie asked anxiously, realizing for the first time how much agony his wife was enduring.

"I have an opiate that will put her into a half-sleep, half-awake state. It will space the pains out but will cause longer labour." He placed his hand on her belly.

"The baby is still too high for delivery." He lifted the sheet. "The water hasn't broken yet, which is good. We don't want a dry birth with this baby. We need all the good luck we can get."

Josiah fished in his bag and found a vial. "I need a small amount of water to mix this for her."

As he stirred the mixture he explained to Katy, "This will

make you sleepy and take away most of your pain. We don't want to stop the labours just slow them down until the baby drops. Katy, when did the pains start and why?"

"I fell this morning and they started not too long after that."

"Why didn't you send for me?" Jamie demanded.

"I didn't want to bother you. You have been so busy lately."

His eyes darkened in anger. "I am not that busy. You didn't tell me anything was wrong when I came home."

Katy started crying.

"That's unimportant now. I want you to drink this and rest." Josiah held her head as she drank the medicine.

"Let's get these linens changed. Jamie, will you hold Katy?"

Tenderly, Jamie lifted his wife into his arms.

"Jamie, hold me close, I'm so afraid."

With an outward calmness, not felt inside, Jamie tried to reassure Katy. "Do not be afraid, Love, with Beulah and Josiah here you are in the best of hands. It will soon be over and the baby will be nestling in your arms, denying me that coveted privilege." His weak attempt at jest brought a slight smile to her trembling lips.

She stiffened in his arms and a gasp escaped through tightly closed lips. She buried her face against his chest, holding her breath until the spasm released her from its grasp. Jamie pushed her hair back away from her pallid face with shaking fingers, then bent and kissed her lightly on the mouth. She raised trusting eyes that were gradually responding to the drug.

"You can lay her back down now, Captain. Good, good, she's almost asleep. Beulah, the pains should begin to lessen. She needs to have some of this medicine about every—oh—five or six hours. Just fix it the way I did. When you get tired, call me and I'll relieve you. You might want to change her gown too."

"I won't git too tared ter tak care of my Missy," the Negress said drawing herself up straight and glowering at the doctor.

"I'm sure you won't. But we should make sure we're both fresh and rested. Missy is going to have a long, hard struggle and she's going to need two rested doctors. The baby is very large and Missy, I'm afraid, is very small." He arose and moved to the door. "When you need to rest you can find me in the library."

As Jamie followed the doctor downstairs, he asked worriedly, "Do you think the labour will last longer than six hours?"

"I'm afraid so."

"You don't think she will—die do you, Josiah?" Jamie stumbled over the word.

Josiah laid his hand on the sagging shoulder of his friend, "Not if I can help it, Jamie, but if you know how to pray, I suggest you start anytime now."

An icy hand seemed to close around Jamie's heart. He threw himself down into one of the chairs and sat dejectedly. He twisted and turned restlessly, then stood up and began pacing the floor.

"Captain, I suggest you conserve your energy; besides you are making me nervous."

Jamie stood in the middle of the room as if not knowing what he should do. He ran his hand through his hair in agitation, then in sudden decision turned in the direction of the oaken cabinet. Opening the glass door, he retrieved a decanter of brandy from one of the shelves. Turning to Josiah, he raised the bottle upward, "Want one?"

"Maybe just one. Got to keep a clear head, you know."

They drank in silence. Jamie sat staring at the floor while turning the half-empty glass between his hands. Memories flooded his mind. Memories of the frightened woman-child who had faced him in silent fear the first night aboard the Hawk. Memories of the brutal welcome he had forced upon her. Memories of a slim, beautiful Katy, a laughing, happy

Katy. Memories—He swore softly, jumping to his feet angrily, condemning himself for the agony she was enduring now.

“Forget it, Jamie, let the past be past.”

“Forget it!” he ground out between clenched teeth. “God, how I hate myself!”

“We all do at a time like this.”

“How in the hell would you know!” he demanded heatedly, refusing to be pacified.

“When my wife and child died in childbirth, I blamed myself too. Because I was a doctor, I felt I should have been able to save them. I told you how I punished myself for my crime. If it had not been for Robert I’d still be wallowing in self-pity in some stink-hole somewhere. But with his help I decided to find out why they died. Europe offered me no answers. I knew as much as they could teach me, so I turned to the ‘ignorant savages’ for knowledge. I lived with the Indians in the Yucatan and studied their methods. I was amazed at the babies that survived at birth until I learned their procedure. They have to save them, almost half of them die before they’re five years old. Very few survive beyond forty. What nature doesn’t kill, the Spanish seem to make up for.”

“Are their methods so different from our own?” Jamie tried to concentrate on Josiah’s conversation, though in reality he didn’t give a damn whether some ignorant, Indian squaw lived or died as long as Katy wasn’t snatched from his aching arms.

“Our method seems to be ‘let them alone and they’ll either deliver or die.’ The Indians use surgery and opiates like those I gave to Katy to relieve pain. Have you ever heard that Julius Ceasar was delivered by cutting his mother’s stomach open and taking him from the womb?” Jamie ran his hand through his hair, eyeing Josiah despondently. “I learned to perform that operation, with good results, from some ‘stupid’ savage.”

“You don’t think you will have to deliver the baby like

that, do you?" Apprehension sharpened Jamie's voice.

"I hope not. Not if you and Katy want more children; sometimes it makes a woman barren."

"After tonight, I don't want anymore."

Josiah smiled. "Well, you two can decide that later. To ease your mind, I should tell you I'll only use that method as a last resort. There are other ways less dangerous than a Caesarian breech."

"Do what you must, Josiah, only if it comes down to a choice—" his voice broke, "save my wife," he whispered, then his voice hardened, "The baby means nothing to me without her. It would only remind me of my guilt and my loss."

In the passing hours Josiah and Beulah took turns nursing Katy. Her agonizing travail lasted through the night and into the next evening. Josiah entered the library to talk with Jamie. He sat down heavily in the chair, fatigue inscribed deeply in each line and crevice in his face.

"The baby has finally dropped, but her pelvic region is too narrow. I am going to have to go inside and try to pull the baby down."

"Pull the baby down—" Jamie repeated the words, thinking he had misunderstood the exhausted man.

"Yes, I'll have to cut her and go in from below to get to the baby's head."

"Katy will never let you do it."

"I will sedate her quite heavily when it is time, she'll know nothing about it until it is all over. It is your permission I want."

Covering his eyes with his hand, Jamie shook his head. "My God," he whispered, "what am I to say? What am I to do?" In the background the clock ticked away the silence. Jamie lifted despairing eyes to gaze into Josiah's melancholy ones.

"Is there no other way?" came the strained utterance.

Josiah shook his head and sighed heavily. "None that I know of. I only wish that I could assure you it will work."

Jamie rested his head on the back of the chair and stared at the ceiling. "You said you would cut her. How—well, what happens after that? Does she—heal—or what? Oh, hell, I don't know what I mean, what do I know about how a woman has a baby?" he growled in his frustration.

"I'll sew her. It's been done before, though I've never done it, at least not in that particular place. Midwives usually deliver babies, you know, so what the hell do I know about it either? So today we will both learn something." He paused, "I'll cut her, it's the only way, Jamie, otherwise the baby will die and I'm afraid, so will Katy. The baby is tearing her up inside."

Jamie dropped his head into his hands. Never had he experienced fear as he did now. He had faced all manners of deadly weapons; he had gone through the agonizing tortures of the Inquisition and overcome overwhelming dangers, always pushing fear aside, but the thought of living without Katy was more than he could bear.

"Save my wife, Josiah, do what you must—but save Katy—please—save—" his voice broke. Tears stung his eyes and rolled down his cheeks; he buried his face in his hands once more.

Josiah's face was outlined with deep lines of fatigue like a chart of grey parchment; he rose and with shoulders sagging in dejection, crossed the room to his sorrowing friend, laid his hand on Jamie's shoulder and squeezed. With heavy heart, he slowly left the room. Crossing the hall, he ascended the stairs with a heavy tread.

Time had stopped as had the clock. Silence enveloped the house in a dark mantle of ominous waiting. Jamie paced the floor until he was exhausted, then rested, only to begin pacing once more.

His knuckles were raw and bleeding from beating them against the door and desk. Each time his pacing took him past the portal or desk, he lashed out savagely with his bloody fists. There was no satisfaction in the pain that followed, no pain could match the ache stored in his soul.

The silence was rent time and again with cries of agony. Frustration and a deep sense of helplessness filled him, stripping away the veneer of pride he had worn as a protective armour all his life. There was no release for the stricken man for guilt rode him like a double-edged sword.

The servants tip-toed around, speaking only in whispers. Death-like, a silence settled across the house. Sitting in a chair exhausted and half asleep, Jamie heard someone enter the room. Instantly, he was alert.

"Josiah, is she—is it over?"

"Yes, it was a hard battle, but we won." He smiled, "You have a new son."

"And Katy—how is Katy?"

"Weak, but I think she will recover." Jamie moved across the room. "Wait, before you go up, let's talk a minute."

"Only for a moment."

"Sit down, will you? It kills my neck to have to look up at someone who reaches to the ceiling. Good. Katy lost a lot of blood and is very weak. She will need a wet nurse, she's too weak to nurse the baby herself. Also, as I told you earlier, she was torn inside quite badly, I did my best, but—" he shrugged, "she may not be able to have any more children."

"But *she* will be all right, won't she?"

"With much rest and care, she should be just as perfect as the old Katy."

Jamie sighed. "That is all I care about."

"She will still be sleepy when you go in as the opiate has not yet worn off. I want her to get all the rest possible, so don't stay long." He could see the anxiety eating at Jamie. "Go on, I can see you're not even listening."

Jamie took the stairs two at a time. He paused only a second before entering the room. The draperies were drawn and the room was dimly lit, giving forth a feeling that it too was resting after the long, painful vigil. Jamie hesitated, suddenly feeling like a stranger in the room he had known for years.

Katy lay asleep in the freshly made bed. After braiding her

hair and making the exhausted woman as comfortable as possible, Beulah had left Katy to rest. Jamie felt an ache in the back of his throat. Never had his wife appeared more beautiful to him than now. She looked more like an innocent, young maiden sleeping than the mother of his son who reposed peacefully beside her.

Jamie studied the tiny lad who had caused the terrible fear which had racked him for so many hours. Were all babies so red and wrinkled? Could it be possible that this tiny, ugly bundle, who resembled a wizened old man, was his—or Katy's? Where was the beauty of the mother or the hawk-like beak of the Bartletts to mark him as their own? Did time replace the red, wrinkled, old-mannish appearance with the pink, smooth, bloom of youth? Was this small interloper worth the hellish agony Katy had endured to give him life?

His attention shifted as Katy slightly moved. Something unfamiliar stirred within him. He searched his inner self trying to seek out that unperceived fancy. His dark eyes narrowed and a scowl appeared as he pursued the elusive thought. Faith! He scoffed silently at the word. Could it be? No! Impossible! Faith was an unproven, illusive belief; wherein was the evidence of unseen faith? his common sense argued.

Where had God been when he and his crew had been captured by the Spanish and he had watched them killed one by one? Where had that unseen Protector been during the terror-filled days and nights when he had suffered in the hands of the Inquisition? Wherein had been the Majesty of Heaven when weakened faith of young manhood had died of starvation amid the evil and cruelty done in His Name in that dank hole beneath the grey stone prison in Porto Bello?

Love pierced the heart with a quiet reminder: Where was God tonight, when Katy needed Him? The arguing voice was silenced by the evidence of mother and son sleeping peacefully together.

Jamie had been without any belief in a higher power than himself for so long that he was unsure how to approach the

Supreme Lord who had given him back his wife. He knelt beside the bed and bowed his head. Forgotten fragments of prayers taught to him in his youth by his mother returned and he offered them to the heavens silently. Badly shaken by rediscovered knowledge he had thought long dead, he lingered in the darkened room until he was sure all evidence of human weakness had disappeared. New-found faith, he ascertained cynically, wavered, blowing hot then cold, depending on how it was nurtured.

On entering the library in search of Josiah, he found the room empty. Lying down on the divan, his long legs hanging over the arm, he tried to rest. His body felt sapped of strength and will; Josiah entered and expelled a deep sigh as he sank into a chair. Dropping his arm from his face, Jamie eyed the sprawling figure. "You look tired."

"Exhausted is the word."

"I thought you were in bed asleep." He viewed the doctor with a taunting eye. "Surely you are not out seeking a little fluff butt after all you have been through these past two days, are you?"

Josiah chuckled, "Too tired to even think about women. Beulah and I were fortunate to find a wet nurse for the baby."

"Oh?"

"Amanda delivered tonight. A strong boy to help pick your cotton."

Jamie stretched, "Good, I can always use an extra pair of hands around here, though I wish someone would find a way to make them grow faster."

"Selfish, aren't you? You planters would even deny them a childhood, if it were possible." As Jamie bristled, Josiah threw up his hands in surrender. "No, no, too worn out to argue about it, besides it's your business, not mine." He yawned, "If you are not going to use that bed upstairs, I am. I'll stop in and see how Katy's doing. Hopefully she won't develop any of the disturbances of the humours that follow childbirth, I don't think she is strong enough to fight

anything else." He heaved a deep sigh as he pushed his way up out of the deep chair.

"I can have someone make up one of the guest rooms."

"No need—unless you want to use the bed."

"No, I'll stay here. I must be in the fields early tomorrow."

"Then I'll say goodnight, Captain."

"Goodnight, Josiah." The doctor moved to the doorway. "And Josiah—" the tall, slim man turned to face the hesitant Captain, "if there is ever anything—" Smilingly, the doctor waved the stumbling words of gratitude aside.

Chapter 18

The next few days Katy lay as if in a stupor. She could see and hear everything going on around her, but she was so weakened from her ordeal that it was too much of an effort to function in any way. Everyone walked around her on silent feet, whispering only when necessary. She knew a baby cried several times, but the outcry seemed to come from the other side of the dim, foggy world in which she dwelt.

As awareness returned she remembered excruciating torment. When she moved her legs, pain stabbed through her groin and up into the pelvic region. Her throat was raw from both the releasing and restraining of the grueling spasms of agony. She had never realised the body could withstand such suffering.

She obeyed all commands given her, for she could do all these things on reflex. When someone told her to eat she opened her mouth and chewed or swallowed on command. When she was told to drink she did so. It was a relief not to be burdened with the mundane problems of life.

Katy began responding to her surroundings on the third day. Little by little, she took an interest in what was going on around her.

A baby cried. She lay quietly, listening as he wailed again. Groggily, she wondered to whom the baby belonged.

A soft moan escaped her.

"She's awake," someone whispered.

Then a large hand clasped her small one and she forced her eyes open and looked into the worried face of her husband.

"Katy." He brought her hand to his lips and knelt beside the bed watching her.

A weak smile parted her lips. "Jamie," she whispered.

"How do you feel?"

"Very tired and—I-I seem to hurt."

"Of that I can believe," he grinned. "Our son weighs about half a stone, according to Josiah."

"Our son," a smile rested upon her pale lips as the words touched them with pride. "Our son—is he healthy—strong?"

"Aye, lass, he's all that. A little ugly. Takes that after his father, I would say."

"May I see him? May I hold him?"

A wide smile split Beulah's ebony face. "Yas, ma'am! Here de little honey chile is. Jist as good as gold, he is. Neber cries or causes no fuss, only when he needs his attentions at either end. Jist a beautiful honey lamb, he is. Go ter yo Mammy now," she cooed.

Katy looked down at the long awaited stranger. He was red and wrinkled and chubby, but to her loving eyes he was a beautiful child and the image of his sire. Love swelled over her in waves and unbidden tears rolled down her cheeks.

Jamie ran his fingers across her cheek, gently catching the droplets. "Tears, my lady?"

With a smile lighting up her face, she blinked the wetness away, "Of happiness," she whispered. "Isn't he the most beautiful baby you have ever seen?"

"Well, I have not seen very many babies, but if he suits you, love, we shall keep him."

The center of attraction found all this attention very tiresome and to prove it, opened his mouth in a very bored way, promptly stuck in his fist, and started sucking on it very loudly.

"Beulah, he's hungry."

"No, Missy, he jist ate. He jist gittin' in ter a bad habit we'se gotta break," Beulah grumbled, picking him up and feigning anger. "Jist goin' ter have ter fix the young master a nice, sweet sugar-tit, ah reckon, we sho don't want him ter have big, ole buck teeth, do we, honey lamb?"

Katy turned to both of them puzzled, "He just ate — but how?"

"Josiah felt you would be too weak to nurse the baby and since Amanda had her son the same night you delivered, she's nursing Richard also. She appears to have more than enough milk for both babies."

"Richard?"

"After my grandfather."

"Oh, yes, of course."

"I think we have stayed longer than we should. Josiah will be in here after us with a club." He kissed her gently. "Thank you, Katy, for my son. I can think of no greater gift that a woman can give a man than the gift of life and the promise of posterity."

She tried to smile back at him, but Morpheus was already luring her into his pleasant world of soothing mists and comforting rest.

The next weeks were spent sleeping, eating and resting and recovering her strength.

Misty fingers of tranquility swirled in the peaceful gulf of quiescence where Katy dwelt. A golden beam invaded the sombre room through the slit in the heavy velvet draperies and danced across the floor. Frowning at the audacious beam, Katy turned her back and buried her face in the pillow, refusing to allow anything to disturb the warm indolent mood which surrounded her.

Loud, angry voices jostled all thoughts of sleep from her. The bedroom door stood ajar and the fury and disgust in her husband's voice carried up the stairs.

"I don't want the son of a bitch here! What is he doing in Virginia anyway?"

"He has been here taking care of your business and his own while you have been chasing over half of the world. Who do you think has been taking care of this plantation these last years while you have pursued Amelia Darcy all over London? And while you were keeping bed and board at Mistress Kettle's bordello? Oh, yes, we know all about it." His mother's voice was thick with contempt. "So take care how you judge others."

"Really, my dear, I don't need a woman to protect me from this young whelp. It is quite refreshing to find a tarnished spot in his shining armour," a deep voice replied with disdain. The voice sounded familiar, yet somehow that of a stranger.

"What do you mean, he has been here taking care of Fortune's Fancy these years I have been chasing around the world? I left Fortune's Fancy in capable hands while I was away. Does he just happen to come over here every year while I am away or do we have a conspiracy breeding behind my back? Why haven't I been informed of this by anyone?" Jamie demanded, his voice lowering acrimoniously.

"Someone had to make sure everything ran smoothly while you were busy pursuing that lovely titled lady and her inheritance. Too bad that it eluded you, but then your values in life have always been . . . shall we say, crude?"

Katy shuddered at the contemptuous laugh which burst from Jamie's throat. "Crude! My values!" Again that brutal guffaw of ridicule cut the air.

"As to your ignorance of my presence, the slaves were told to keep their silence. I must say they are very well disciplined. Men like Woodruff can be paid to seal their lips. As it became a yearly matter, I suppose everyone assumed that it was to be the way of things," Lord Bartlett informed his son in a bored tone, inspecting his manicured nails closely.

"They can just assume otherwise! I will cut the legs of someone..."

His father interrupted. "Why? Fortune's Fancy has never really meant that much to you, has it? In reality, it was just one more way for you to try to flaunt your ingratitude toward me. You were always too busy playing pirate or chasing your titled Lady to be interested in the land. By the law of primogeniture, this land should be mine, but unfortunately English laws leave something to be desired in the colonies."

"You had your chance with this land and bungled it," Jamie boiled. "You own all the land that should be yours, according to the law. Even though Grandfather did not want you to have the estates and title, I did not intend to retain them. I did not want them in the first place; they were not mine to keep. But do not fill your head with any wild schemes about Fortune's Fancy, M'Lord, for it is mine! Bought and paid for, not only by hard coin, but by blood and lives lost along the Spanish Main!

"I have been home three months working day and night to save the land of which you are so covetous, M'Lord," Jamie ended, "Where have you been?"

"He has been in New York on business," his mother snapped.

"How very convenient." Jamie's voice oozed scorn. "He disappears when it really comes time to run this plantation. Of course, M'Lord, I forgot, a *gentleman* of the House of Lords would not condescend to actually work with us of the common folk."

"There is nothing common about you, Jamie. You can trace your family for hundreds of years through the royal lines of England and Normandy, but if you insist on working alongside the niggers that is your business. Just do not expect me out there at your side. I did not pour money into the slaves to have to work like one." The father's bored tones took on a slight tinge of anger.

The dark scornful face of her husband appeared in Katy's

mind, as his demonic laugh floated upwards into her ears. "If anyone sees you beside one of the slaves, M'Lord, we both know it will not be in a vertical position."

There was a loud slap and Lady Bartlett's shrill voice echoed, "You bastard! How dare you speak to your father in that fashion?"

Katy's hand flew to her mouth in horror. She prayed that Jamie would have the strength to control his unpredictable temper. She strained to hear the muted reply thick with suppressed anger. "Bastard I am, M'Lady! Thanks to you—and him!"

She heard his heavy booted foot strike the carpeted stair.

"Take your damnable hand off me, you swine, or I shall kill you with my bare hands, here and now!"

Soon the sound of angry feet sounded down the highly polished hallway and he thrust himself into the bedroom. The door resounded from his fury. The baby let out a startled cry in the nursery and cried in a frightened sobbing way until Amanda soothed him.

Jamie's face was white with anger. On his left cheek his mother's handprint blazed crimson. His breath came in short, jagged pants in his rage. Whirling around, he slammed his fist into the heavy oaken door, then leaned his head against it, welcoming the pain that shot up through the knuckles and hand and raced up into his arm and shoulder. Turning sharply, he paced the floor. His jaw worked violently. His dark scowl was so tight his head ached.

"Why I don't kill that bastard, I shall never know." He pounded his fist into his hand brutally. His knuckles felt broken but his anger overshadowed everything, including pain. "How dare they conspire for my inheritance behind my back," he muttered. "For four years!" He shook his head in disbelief.

Suddenly his pacing ceased. Uttering an angry oath, he stamped across the room. Once more the door vibrated and Katy could hear his heavy tread as he strode the length of the hallway and down the stairs. As infuriated as he was, Katy

was sure his destination was the library and the well-stocked, heavy oaken cabinet.

A few minutes later Diablo was racing down the road. Katy hurried weakly to the window and saw Jamie cut across the meadow, quirting the great gelding unmercifully as they raced toward the wharf.

She sat for a long time on the window sill looking out at where the Hawk was anchored. She wished Billy was still at home so he could look after Jamie. She was frightened, for the anger which possessed him was beyond her comprehension. Before meeting Jamie she never knew a person could contain so much wrath and hatred.

Although she had not yet met Lord Bartlett, she was already wary of the danger he presented in the household. She had been unable to come to an understanding of the violent breach which separated the two until now. From the scene overheard, she had come to the conclusion that his Lordship took silent pleasure at the anger he was able to invoke in his temperamental son, not only by his arrogant demeanour, but also by the insolent barbs cast at him.

Katy stood at the window, brushing her hair idly. It seemed she had been continuously in that place since Jamie had raced the black gelding across the meadow yesterday afternoon. Her great weakness seemed to have vanished in her concern for her husband. She had spent the greater part of yesterday sitting on the wide sill, leaning against the casing, until weakness and fatigue had driven her back to bed. Then last night she had lain awake for the greater part of the night, worrying and praying for his safety.

In deep thought and concern, she failed to hear the door open and close behind her. She pulled the brush through the long, tangled auburn mass. Her night shift hung loosely to her thighs, open in front just below the divergence of her long, smooth legs. As she raised her arm to pull the brush downward the shirt crept up, revealing the rounded curve of her buttocks.

Turning slightly, she sighted someone out of the corner of her eye, and spun around joyfully. At first she thought it was Jamie, standing with folded arms and crossed boots against the door jam. The stranger was smiling amusedly with the same sensuous mouth, but it was surrounded by a meticulously groomed Van Dyke beard. His hair and beard were sprinkled with silver. Katy recognised him as an older image of her husband, but without the dark scowl he wore so often.

"I wondered if the front was as beautiful as the rear. I must say it surpasses all expectations. You are most lovely, my dear."

Gleaming dark eyes slowly traveled over her body and she felt as if she had just been stripped of what little covering she wore. Crossing quickly to the bed, she hurriedly slipped into her robe.

"They told me Jamie's wife was beautiful, but I am afraid they understated that beauty."

"M'Lord," she gave a slight dip that served as a curtsy, "I didn't hear you knock," she apologised.

"Perhaps that is because I did not. I was told you were still quite ill, so I didn't want to disturb you if you were sleeping. You have had an amazing recovery, my dear, after so hard a time delivering my grandson."

"I feel stronger each day, thank you."

"I must say it is too bad Richard does not take after his mother. All Bartlett babies are rather ugly, but they seem to grow out of it, thank God."

"Has Jamie returned yet?"

"No, we received word he is aboard that pirate scow of his, drunk as a lord, if you will excuse the expression. It appears he has two terrible afflictions—a terrible temper and a terrible thirst for brandy." He smiled at his own attempt at wit.

Katy felt a strange stirring within herself at the strong resemblance between father and son. The father's face was gentle and relaxed as if nothing was important enough to

bother him. Jamie's face was continually masked, except on rare occasions, as if he were constantly on guard. The only time he was truly forbearing was in sleep, then his face gentled and he assumed the appearance of his sire.

She swayed suddenly as a light veil of weakness overshadowed her. Her father-in-law was immediately beside her.

"Are you all right, my dear?"

"Y-yes, I think so."

"It would appear we have both been deceived. You are not nearly as strong as you led me to believe. Here, let me help you to your bed."

Katy leaned against him as he guided her to the bed. She sat down and swung her feet onto the bed. The robe fell open, exposing the long, slender limbs, before he pulled the blanket over her.

"You are a lovely woman, Katy. Jamie should feel very fortunate that he did not let a prize like you escape him."

"Thank you, M'Lord," she blushed at his bold look.

His dark gaze continued its outrageous pursuit. Katy felt her colour heighten under the devouring contemplation and squirmed restlessly. Suddenly his look changed from one of admiration to one of lust. She had seen the look staring out of familiar eyes before. It was an eerie, frightening feeling to see sensual desire ebbing up into the black eyes that were so like Jamie's. Her heart quickened and she tried to shove him away. Small groans emitted from her fear-tightened throat as his mouth covered hers gently and expertly massaged her lips with his own. Intimate sensations stirred her blood and caused it to race through her veins, and she succumbed to the passions building inside her. Her mouth returned the incredibly tender yet passionate kiss with a passion of its own. His questing hands moved across her body as if they were already familiar with the slender curves and delightful mounds and valleys they sought. A small moan of suppressed desire forced its way from her throat and his hold tightened around Katy like steely bands crushing her to him.

Slowly her whirling senses returned. With horror, she remembered this was not Jamie. This mouth was too expert, too professional to be the impulsive, eager lover Jamie was.

With a cry of dismay, Katy lashed out with both fists, striking his Lordship across the shoulders and chest until he released the lovely distraught creature writhing beneath his grasp. Grabbing her wrists and holding her down with her arms crossed against her breasts, he smiled at her in amusement.

"I can tell Jamie never kisses you like that, does he, my dear? No, of course not. It takes a long time and a great deal of practice and cooperation to master a technique of love as I have. Perhaps I shall demonstrate it fully to you one day. Jamie is too impulsive to have any finesse in the game of passion."

She released deep gasps beneath his crushing hold, "Jamie would kill you if I told him of your outrageous attack."

"But you won't, will you, my dear. You enjoyed it too much. Come, lovely one, admit it to yourself. Even now your heart is still racing from the passions wakened in you."

Katy's face flamed from the guilt his words aroused. He laughed softly, confidently, and rose to his feet. "We will have to wait for another time for lesson two. Sometime when there is more time, more privacy and you are in better physical condition." A boyish smile played around his mouth.

As he stood over her, Katy was fully aware of the hazardous figure he presented. Yet she had to admit he was a very handsome man in his dark black velvet doublet and matching breeches. Delicate lacy ruffles spilled out at the throat and wrists, gracefully relieving the monotony of the somber colour. He was sure of the picture he fostered: a man of the world, full of poise and self-assurance; an ardent and accomplished lover, a handsome, graceful and sensuous animal.

"There will be no other time, M'Lord. I am your

daughter-in-law, not your concubine," she told him coldly.

He continued to smile at her in that infuriating devil-may-care way. "That has never made any difference to my other sons' wives." He laughed at her shocked expression. "Women are all alike, Katy. If they do not have their love fulfilled at home, they seek it elsewhere."

"And you are always conveniently around, I suppose," she commented with disdain.

He shrugged, the smile still flaunting itself.

"Don't expect me to warm your bed, M'Lord. I am happy in my own."

"So we all try to convince ourselves." He yawned. "Oh yes, before I go, Valentine and I were wondering who your parents are?"

"Why? Would you like to compare pedigrees? If so, I am sorry to disappoint you. I don't know who my parents were."

"That is too bad. You have an amazing resemblance to someone we know." With his hand on the knob, he turned. "Before I go, may I impress one point upon you? Do not make the mistake of under-estimating my abilities, Katy, in anything. Smooth waters always run deep, as they say. Have you ever noticed the narrow scar beneath my son's left eye? Sometime you might ask him who inflicted it and why." A sarcastic laugh escaped his smiling lips. "By your leave, my dear." He bowed and walked slowly out of the room.

Katy suddenly felt as if all her energy was being sucked out of her body. She felt too weary even to tremble. Her emotions were at the brink of exhaustion and tears welled in her eyes. "Jamie, help me," she whispered.

Some days later, Katy's hurried stride took her more than halfway into the library where she was intent on seeking out a volume to relieve the enforced monotony. She didn't feel like an invalid. Indeed, her body even now cried out for activity, but no one would heed her wishes. Her eyes searched the many filled shelves.

As they did so, a slight movement at the window brought

her to an abrupt halt. He stood in the familiar black ensemble. She opened her mouth to speak a greeting, but the words died on her lips. Something was amiss. But what?

She ran her eyes over the tall, muscular frame. The black doublet hugged the wide, forceful shoulders, even as the breeches clung to the narrow waist and hips and emphasised the staunch, sinewy legs.

Words once more rose to her lips, as his hand brought the glass to his mouth. The large ring with the heavy crest glittered on his finger. She stifled her outcry and turned on quiet feet, retracing her path. The quick motion caught his eye and he turned and watched her stealthy movements with an amused smile until she nearly reached the door, then he chuckled. She immediately froze. As the silence continued she turned slowly toward him.

"May I be of some service, Daughter?"

She trembled as cold chills trickled down her spine at the familiar inflection in his voice.

"You seem chilly, my dear. Come over by the window. The sun is quite warm here."

Her feet refused to move; she seemed rooted to the spot. He moved to her side and took her hand.

"Come, come," he ordered impatiently. He turned her to face him.

The warm rays of the sun touched her back. It felt as if a gentle hand caressed her, causing her blood to surge warmly. The coldness which had invaded her body retreated slowly.

"My, my. Your hands are like ice," he told her softly. "I believe you are afraid of me, my dear," he smiled sardonically.

She shook her head in protest, her eyes wide.

An amused sigh escaped him and he shook his head cynically as he eyed her. Katy felt as if each garment she had donned earlier was being removed, removed artfully and carefully and slowly. Here was no Jamie to rip and tear in urgency and eagerness.

She fought the desire to cross her arms over her bosom.

She could almost feel the moist, hot lips pressed there. The pulse at the base of her throat beat wildly. His smile widened as he watched the throbbing vessel.

"Your hair is a living flame in the rays of the sun." His hand caressed the loose, fiery mane. "My son is an amazing man. It seems he could fall into a dung heap, but before his body reached the odourous mass it would turn into a bed of roses. Do not misunderstand me, my dear, I do not imply that you are in any way comparable to a dung heap, quite the opposite. You are one of the most beautiful roses he has ever fallen into bed with." His eyes caressed her and each place they touched burned. A rosy hue rushed across her face.

Lord Bartlett raised his brows in surprise. "Can it possibly be that you are an innocent rose also? My, my, he *is* an amazing fellow." He toyed with a loose curl which had fallen across her breast.

Fearfully, she reached up and drew it away from his hand and tossed it over her shoulder. His hand remained where it was. She could feel the slight pressure against her bosom.

She tried to step back, but her legs were against the window seat and she unceremoniously found herself sitting in the seat looking up at him.

His hands found her elbows and raised her to her feet. "You need not be afraid of me, my dear. I intend to spend many playful hours with you. They can not be pleasurable for either of us if there is fear or mistrust between us."

With a show of bravado, not felt within, Katy retorted, "I do not fear you, M'Lord, only for your safety."

"My safety?" he questioned. "*My* safety." he repeated acidly. "Ah, yes, my son's violent temper, you mean." He threw back his head and laughed caustically.

Movement at the library door startled and frightened Katy and she tried to push his hands away, but he persisted on keeping them on her arms.

"Please, Lord, someone will discover us."

"Doesn't a father-in-law have the right to converse with his newly met daughter-in-law? And to become better

acquainted with her?" His voice lowered intimately. "Much, much, better acquainted?" He lowered his head.

With an abruptness unexpected, Katy jerked away from him and darted under his extended arms.

He turned with an insolent smile. "Do not be afraid, my dear. I only intended it to be a fatherly kiss."

Her throat felt dry, her legs trembled as she remembered his mouth on hers once before, and her face burned at the memory. She felt as if her feet were glued to the spot where she stood.

"Ah, it is refreshing to find that my other token of—shall we say—fatherly affection is remembered."

Her mouth opened to make an angry retort when a screech sounded behind her. Whirling fearfully, she was confronted by her mother-in-law. The deranged woman approached her slowly, a long-bladed knife gleaming in her fist. Feral glints flashed wildly from her frenzied ice blue eyes.

Katy's legs weakened in fright, nearly buckling under her from the fury blazing from those demented orbs. A scream strained at her closed throat as she tried to will her frozen limbs to flee before the furibund vial of wrath skulking ominously toward her.

An ivory talon streaked forward and grabbed a handful of Katy's long, glowing tresses. "You damnable red-headed witch! You will never have him!" The trenchant blade glittered above the tousled blonde mass and Katy's blood turned to water as the terror rushed through her. The pounding of her heart ceased and she cowered before the maddened woman. Small strangled sounds escaped her sealed throat while flashes of ebony darted before her closed eyes and the terrified girl prayed to faint before the blade struck.

Panic-stricken, she seemed to envision two figures moving quickly toward her. Katy viewed the struggle taking place from a distance, as though through a long, narrow tube. Her heart, stilled for a moment, was now beating

loudly like a heathen drum, and her breath came in short, painful sobs.

When she was at last able to comprehend what was happening, she saw Jamie and his father struggling with the raving woman. Lady Bartlett appeared to have the strength of ten men in her frantic condition.

Katy gasped as Jamie balled his fist and struck the woman on her jaw. Her head snapped back and the crazed eyes clouded over as she slumped to the floor.

Lord Bartlett dropped to his knees and cradled his unconscious wife to his chest. Jamie drew Katy against him and held her as she released her fright in a flow of tears. His steely arms tightened around her trembling body, drawing her closer. As he held her, his eyes surveyed the disorder around him.

His mother still lay unconscious. His father had moved her to the divan and was still chafing her wrists. The knife lay bare and menacing in the middle of the floor. Chairs and stands had been upended in the struggle. Crushed petals and blossoms from the elegant bouquets Amanda had brought in from the garden earlier lay strewn over the carpet, puddles of water from shattered vases darkened the luxurious Persian covering. The turbulent moments before had left their mark on nearly every part of the room. Jamie's storming eyes softened as they lowered to the still trembling form lying in his arms, he sensed her inner struggle to overcome the horror she had endured.

"My God, Katy, what happened? She could have killed you."

Lord Bartlett tensed at the question. His apprehension went unnoticed.

"Your father and I were—we were just talking and she—your mother came in screaming at me—like a . . . a mad woman," she stammered hysterically. "—Waving that knife at me. Oh God, Jamie, I thought she—I thought she was going to—kill me. Your father and I—we were only talking—honestly." She raised her fear filled eyes to his.

"You were talking. He was planning. He has never talked to a woman in his life for the sole purpose of conversation." Anger-darkened eyes turned suspiciously on his sire.

Lord Bartlett met the glower with his infuriating, condescending smirk.

Katy felt Jamie's hands clench into hard fists at her back as he fought against the loathing that that smarting leer invoked. His hand at her back, he moved Katy toward the door and stairs. Weakened legs crumbled and she fell against him. Strong hands rescued her and swung her upward into his strong embrace and she lay exhausted against his chest.

The days and weeks following were full of activities. Katy found it very easy to avoid Lord and Lady Bartlett. She learned through the gossip of the household servants that Lady Bartlett was radiantly happy since her husband had joined her. Katy could often hear her playing the harpsichord and singing to him in the sitting room. She and Jamie had joined them in the dining room for dinner several times, but it rankled Jamie to have his father sit at the head of the table and he at the other end, with his mother to the right and Katy to the left of the Lord of the House of Bartlett, as his mother insisted. He rarely argued with her Ladyship; it was easier to let her have her way in mundane things. Katy knew if it came to an important decision who would have the final word in that matter. Yet she felt uneasy about the arrangement as the mask failed to hide completely the ire shadowed in Jamie's dark eyes.

With her husband at her side most of the time now, Valentine Bartlett was a happy, glowing individual. Her beauty, which had not diminished with the years, seemed to grow day by day. Lord Bartlett, to all curious eyes, appeared to dote on her every word and action. Katy wouldn't have believed they were anything but newlyweds, if she hadn't known the truth.

Yet even though Lord Bartlett was a very attentive husband, Katy still felt uneasy around him, for his eyes

followed her everywhere. He nearly always wore the urbane half-smile that had become so familiar to her. He seemed to consider the animosity of his son a grand joke and would often say things deliberately to upset him.

Once the meal was over, Jamie always found an excuse to take Katy and himself away from his parent's company. They spent many hours with their son, learning to care for him from Amanda and Beulah. Richard charmed them, laughing and cooing his delight at their attention. Jamie found himself hesitant about picking him up and holding him. Laughingly, Katy would time and again show the reluctant father how to cradle the baby in his arms and he would feel secure until the babe started squirming or crying. Then he gratefully relinquished the wiggling bundle to the eager mother.

Katy spent many happy hours mending and sewing for her small family while watching them play at her feet. She reflected on how much love and happiness she had missed as a child by not having parents to love and protect her. She made a vow that nothing would stand in her way of being the best mother and wife possible.

She was always amazed at the gentleness and deep affection Jamie displayed toward his son. His laughter, mixed with the playful squeals of his heir, tuned the chords of her heart, stirring them to a melodic symphony.

As she dressed for dinner, she did so with a highly critical eye. Ever since one particularly unpleasant episode she had made sure that when they dined with her in-laws she dressed modestly.

One evening, to please Jamie, she had worn the mended brocade gown he had presented to her aboard the Hawk the evening she was determined to show him that she was an entity unto herself. She had smiled to herself, remembering that dismal failure. The second evening in that same gown had also turned out to be a disastrous failure because of the

attention she had received from both men, and the dress now hung in the back of her chiffonier.

All through the arduous meal, Jamie had been consumed by jealousy and had sulked and imbibed with a disquieting vigilance. Lord Bartlett's piercing eyes had feasted upon his daughter-in-law's beauty and his compliments, spoken in a low silken voice, only added to Katy's distress. Her discomfort had become so great she asked to be excused because of a headache. Scornfully, Jamie had refused her request. With a menacing glare, he had silently observed her every action and look. Her father-in-law had watched the tension growing between them with amusement.

Lady Bartlett had been quietly secure in her own little world all evening, not noticing the by-play between the three. About halfway through the meal she had looked up to make a comment and noticed the attention Katy was receiving. Harsh, cruel words were tossed back and forth and Katy had fled to her room in tears. Jamie had followed and a quarrel had ensued, with the two barely speaking for several days. From that experience Katy had promised herself that she would neither say nor do anything to raise Jamie's wrath again.

She turned and twisted in front of the full-length mirror. Her dress of dark green intensified the greenness of her eyes. Simply made, the gown was highnecked with severely cut sleeves. The waistline fitted high, gathering slightly under her bosom. To complement the simplicity of the garment, she decided to wear her mother's locket. She opened the gold pendant and stared at the pictures inside. The girl was not much older than herself, with brown hair falling over her slender shoulders and ringlets encircling the oval face. Light brown eyes peered demurely from under slanted brows, the short nose tilted slightly at the end. Katy imagined that she could see herself in the likeness of her mother. The young man had coppery hair that fell to wide masculine shoulders, a high forehead that slanted into a long aquiline nose

separated two deep hued emerald eyes. His lips were thin; a cleft divided the square stubborn, Irish jaw. She knew these two people to be her parents, but there was no knowledge as to who they were or what had happened to them. Closing the locket with a sigh and barely glancing at the crest etched on the outside of the golden pendant, she smoothed her gown once more. Thrusting her face closer to the mirror, Katy pinched both of her cheeks until they glowed, then bit at both lips. Satisfied at last with her appearance, she joined her in-laws in the drawing room where they waited for her.

"I am sorry Jamie is late, he should be home at any time. Would you care to wait for him or shall we dine?" Katy asked.

"Since you believe he will be here shortly, I think we should wait," Lady Bartlett suggested.

"I'll tell Calab."

When she returned, Lord Bartlett stood beneath his wife's portrait, leaning against the mantle and listening to her play the harpsichord. Katy sat down on the divan and listened to the beautiful music.

"My wife is quite an artist, don't you agree, my dear?" Lord Bartlett remarked as they clapped their hands politely.

"Yes, that was lovely. Would you play again, M'Lady?"

Katy sat deeply enchanted by the lilting music. Her eyes were slightly closed, the better to enjoy the serenade. She was so absorbed in the music that she had no idea when his Lordship had moved beside her.

"Beautiful," he whispered.

Startled, Katy looked up. He ran his finger the length of her jawbone lightly and she drew her head back slightly, away from his hand. His lips twitched with amusement.

"You are an enchanting creature, my dear," he whispered.

She shook her head sharply, frowning her disapproval.

He threw his head back in silent laughter and sat down on the edge of the divan beside her. His arm slid across the back of the sofa. Katy felt a tingle of alarm as his hand lightly touched the nape of her neck. Placing his elbow on his knee, His Lordship lowered his chin onto his fist and studied her.

Katy felt the flush rising out of the high neck of her gown at his close scrutiny. She saw mirth light up his eyes and twitch at the corners of his mouth as he observed her modest attire, knowing it was for his benefit.

"I am delighted to see my attentions have not gone completely unobserved, my dear," he murmured quietly. "Though you really do yourself an injustice, my pet, hiding your delightful charms beneath all of those clothes."

"My Lord—your wife—" Katy whispered desperately.

"Ah, yes, my wife," he sighed, then turned, his chin still resting on his fist, and looked at his wife. Lady Bartlett was still engrossed in her music and swayed slowly back and forth in rhythm with the melodious tune. He watched her for a few seconds and turned back to Katy.

"What is this little trinket?" he asked taking the gold pendant in his hand.

Katy could feel the light pressure of his hand on her bosom. She looked downward. "That—that is my mother's locket."

"Oh?" He lifted his eyes to look into hers and smiled mockingly. The pressure increased ever so slightly as he turned the locket in his hand. "I thought you said you didn't know who your parents were."

"I don't," she replied quickly. She swallowed trying to relieve the tightening in her throat.

His mocking smile deepened. He turned the locket once more, touching her lightly again.

"I... I was given... the locket," she swallowed again, cursing herself for the weakness which always overshadowed her when this suave libertine was near her, "by the Reverend Coswell. He said that it was... my mother's." She stammered again at his touch.

"The Reverend Coswell—was he a relative? Jamie said that was your maiden name."

"No, M'Lord. He raised me from a babe until his wife died." Katy could feel the perspiration beading her forehead.

"Are you warm, my dear?" That same infuriating smile caressed his mouth.

"No, just overly exposed to that enduring Bartlett charm, M'Lord," came the harsh retort from behind.

"Jamie," Katy cried in relief and jumped to her feet.

"Ah, yes," his father sighed, yawning behind jeweled fingers, "Jamie to the rescue of the damsel in distress." He came to his feet slowly, a bored expression on his face.

The music ceased at the first sound of Jamie's voice and his mother joined them.

"You go too far . . . sir," his voice seemed to strangle on the title of respect he cast at the smiling man, "... fondling my wife . . ."

"Oh, come now, young man. Really. Though I must say it is a temptation."

Jamie's eyes snapped and as he took a step forward his mother stepped between the two men.

"In reality, I was admiring her locket. Very interesting. Look at it, Valentine."

Her Ladyship lifted the golden locket and turned it in her palm. Her eyes glowed as she recognized the engraved crest. "Thomas," she exclaimed, "this is the Lemans crest."

"Yes, I know."

"Take it off, my dear," her mother-in-law said excitedly.

Katy unhooked the clasp and handed the locket to them, looking at Jamie in bemusement. He raised an eyebrow in answer to her puzzled look, then turned his attention to his parents.

"Jamie, look at this!"

He shrugged in disgust. He had examined the locket several times before. The engraving was of a Pelican standing over its nest, wounding its breast with its long beak to nourish its young with the blood. The motto of *Spes* was engraved below the crest.

"Does this mean my wife is more acceptable now that her blood appears to be a little bluer?" he asked sardonically.

"Oh, Jamie, don't be asinine. Of course, she's always been accepted. Only . . ." his mother faltered, "it is nicer when you know a bit about family. You know . . ."

"Yes. I know," he replied disgustedly and turned away to find the brandy.

Valentine opened the locket. "Thomas, I knew it! It is Lucy. And, of course, Brent Lafferty. Do you remember the scandal? Lucy refused to marry Marcus Hunt because she was in love with Brent."

"Brent was killed in a duel with Hunt, wasn't he?"

"Yes, and Lucy disappeared and no one ever saw her after that." They turned to Katy. "You *are* Lucy and Brent's daughter. Anyone who knew them would recognize you," Lady Bartlett said softly.

Katy felt a surge of happiness vibrate through her body. After all these years she knew who her parents were. She could find out what they were like and where they came from, and clear some of the mystery that had always surrounded them. Perhaps someday she could find out everything she had always wanted to know about them.

"Could we possibly go in to dinner and continue this over the meal? I, for one, have been working today and am famished."

"Jamie, you have no romance in your soul." His father's voice was slightly tinged with scorn.

"Why? Because I don't give a damn whether she comes from titled family or not? I knew she was blue blood as soon as I saw her. I did not have to see a crest on a locket to tell me that, though I recognized it when I saw it. I chose Katy for herself, not because of her bloodline."

He offered his wife his arm and looked down into her misty eyes. She felt his strength and love beaming down upon her.

"Shall we go in to dinner?—if you both are ready," his father asked, breaking the spell. He handed the locket to Jamie and led the way into the diningroom.

After seating her, Jamie hooked the locket around Katy's neck and as he released the chain, lightly ran his hand down her arm possessively. As he pushed the chair in, she looked up at him and smiled fetchingly.

The evening passed quickly with the conversation stimulated by the revelation brought forth by the locket. Katy was pressed to reveal what little she knew about her past and how she had received the locket.

Excitedly, Lady Bartlett related how Katy's father and mother had met at the King's ball. Her father was Irish and from a titled family also. The two young people had fallen in love and wanted to marry, but Lucy was betrothed to Lord Marcus Hunt. Lucy's father, Jeremy Lemans, had forbidden his daughter to see "that rabble-rousing Irishman again." "Everyone knows," Lord Lemans was supposed to have thundered at his determined daughter, "that those black-guard Irish are revolutionaries, reveling in the mischief they foster against the Crown and the English in general." Gossip had it that they met clandestinely with their friends' help. Lord Hunt, feeling the sneering bite of laughter from friends and enemies alike behind his back, called Brent Lafferty onto the field of honour and killed him. Lucy was disconsolate for weeks, then one day she disappeared and no one saw or heard of her again.

Sitting at her mirror, that night before retiring, Katy tried to contain her excitement as she brushed her hair. Jamie lay upon the bed with his arms folded beneath his head watching her.

"Oh, Jamie, for the first time in my life I feel as if I know my parents. I know for the first time who I am. I know how my mother felt when she discovered that she was with child, for I know how I felt when I first discovered I was pregnant. I think I would have done exactly what she did."

"And what do you think she did, my sweet?"

"Killed herself or died of grief after she had me."

"Or closed herself up in a convent?"

Pausing in her brushing, Katy observed him silently in the mirror for a few moments. "But she was probably Protestant. Why else give me over to a Protestant minister?"

"But your father, being Irish, was Catholic. How else keep his memory alive except through his religion?" He rose and

came up behind her, resting his large hands upon her shoulders.

Katy stared at his hands, trying to keep the tears deep inside her, lest they escape. Such big hands, she thought desperately, such strong hands. She closed her eyes and bit her lower lip. Gentle hands . . . She turned and pressed her face against his stomach. "Oh, Jamie, couldn't she have kept his memory alive . . . through me?" she whispered.

"And take to the streets to support the both of you? How will you ever know?" He pulled her to her feet and kissed her gently. "Don't torture yourself, Katy, Richard and I are your family now. We need no one else to be happy—do you?"

She nestled against his chest, enjoying the feel of his arms about her, the warmth and softness of the silky mat beneath her cheek, the hardness of his powerful chest. Beneath her ear, his heart thundered. She imagined she heard the precious words that his lips rarely formed: "I love you, I love you," the rhythmic beat exclaimed.

"No, I am content and happy—only sometimes . . ." she sighed wistfully. Then added quickly, "No, I am content."

She snuggled closer against him, then chuckled.

"What is so amusing?"

Putting her arms around his neck, she leaned back against his encircling embrace smiling impishly, "Here we are, the two of us. Two bastards, if you please, but with *very* good bloodlines," she giggled.

Jamie joined her mirth and then nibbled at her ear playfully. She turned to him eagerly and willingly.

Katy became a frequent companion at the side of her husband and soon grew familiar with the layout and the functioning of the plantation, spending as much time as possible with him. In the days past she had learned to ride and was now an accomplished horsewoman, which had been no small feat, as she had been terrified of the large animals, having never been around them before. Jamie had almost given up in despair at her great fear of the huge equines. Lord

Bartlett was the one who came to her rescue. Making a special trip to James Towne, he brought a beautiful sorrel mare with three white stockings back to Fortune's Fancy and with great ado presented it to Katy, who promptly named her Cerise.

Even her disgruntled husband had to smile at the excited enthusiasm she had displayed; that is, until in her overzealousness she planted a big buss on Lord Bartlett's cheek. Then Katy was quick to catch the narrowed, darkened eyes glowering at them. She stepped back quickly, suddenly feeling chastised and adjudged. For her the gift lost its attraction and she refused even to look at the animal for several days.

While Jamie was in the fields she slipped down to the barn and gathered enough courage to approach the beautiful mare. As she rubbed the soft velvet nose the horse nickered its pleasure at the gentle feel of the human hand.

Brutus came into the barn and stood beside her. The mare raised her head and moved toward the Negro, whinnied softly, and nudged his hand. He slipped his hand into his pocket and produced a small cake of hard sugar which he broke off and fed to the eager animal.

"Here, Missy, you try it. Horses love sugar."

"Will she bite?"

"No, Missy, all she want is de sweets."

The velvet nose rubbed against her outstretched palm. She felt the impulse to snatch her hand away. Suddenly the long tongue flicked out and the lone piece of sugar was gone.

Katy gave a delighted laugh and held her hand out for another piece of the sugar. For the next week she was found outside Cerise's stall rubbing the horse down, speaking gentle words to the small mare and feeding her pieces of confection.

One day when Jamie asked about her whereabouts, he was astonished to find his wife rubbing the mare down briskly. Standing in the darkened shadows in his black clothes he was able to observe her closely with the animal. He

was surprised to find she had overcome her great fear of the mare.

The next day when Katy returned to the now familiar rendezvous, Jamie was waiting for her. Cerise stood behind him, saddled and bridled.

"Brutus says you have not ridden her yet."

"No," she admitted nervously.

"Would you like to try?"

"I don't know."

"Come here, Katy." She approached him as commanded. "Put out your hand. Pet her."

She ran her hand down the long, slender leg. The mare's muscles twitched in anticipation.

"She is a very gentle animal, Katy."

She raised excited eyes to his. "Do you really think I can?"

"Yes. She knows and trusts you. And you seem to have lost your fear of her. She needs some exercise." He grinned down at her, "I laid out a surprise for you on the bed."

"A surprise... for me?" Her eyes lit up with pleasure.

He smiled crookedly. "If you will go up and try it on, I will saddle Diablo."

Very unladylike, Katy gathered up her skirts and ran all the way to the bedroom. There laid out upon the bed was a camel-brown riding outfit. She ran to the nursery door and opened it.

"Amanda?"

"Yes, Missy."

"Please come and help me," she requested excitedly.

When Katy returned to the front of the house Jamie was waiting for her, astride Diablo. He dismounted and held his cupped hands out to her, giving her instructions on how to mount. Putting her foot into his hands and grasping the saddle in one hand and Jamie's shoulder with the other she was lifted into the saddle. She hooked her leg around the horn with his assistance and arranged her skirt nervously. His hand covered hers and he squeezed it reassuringly.

"You will be fine. Don't be afraid."

Her eyes sparkled with pride as she watched her husband swing gracefully into the saddle. She smiled nervously at him as he instructed her patiently. Then they moved slowly across the long green meadow, Jamie's low voice continuing to instruct her as they rode. Katy's laughter rose on the light breeze as she discovered how easy the task of controlling the gentle mare actually was. The warm air touched her face with tender fingers and the sunrays bathed her hair in a flaming halo. Jamie's eyes rested upon her, enchanted by the beauty revealed before him. Her moods were ever changing, delighting him, filling him with wonderment. As he watched Katy, he saw the woman side of her stand apart while the young girl took her place.

"Come on, you laggard, let's go faster."

His hand shot forth and grabbed the reins. "Not so fast, young lady," he laughed. "Do you want to break that lovely neck? After all, this is your first time on that beast, remember?"

"But she's so gentle. Oh, Jamie, please, just a little faster."

He shook his head in mock exasperation. "Just remember, it is your neck..."

He struck Diablo's side with his boot and the great steed dug his hooves in the soft earth. Cerise needed no encouragement. When she saw the great black gelding move out she tried to match her stride with his. Jamie looked back over his shoulder, his teeth flashed in a wide smile. Katy's booted foot found the sorrel's side and the mare stretched her legs in willing eagerness.

Exhilaration soared through Katy as she felt the wind whip through her now loosened hair. The long tresses flew behind her like a fiery banner. Disappointedly, she could see that the open meadow was quickly merging into a wooded area and Jamie's pace was slowing. Katy pulled back slowly and gently on the reins. Jamie's hand reached for the bridle and the pressure from that strong grasp halted the mare at his side.

Laughingly, she patted Cerise's neck and murmured softly to the panting mare.

"You may turn out to be an accomplished horsewoman, madam." His tone revealed the pride he felt for her. "You may even learn to enjoy riding at my side."

"Jamie, it is wonderful! I love it! I want to ride every day beside you. It is so beautiful and peace..."

Her sentence was cut off suddenly as the mare reared upon her hind legs, issuing a terrified whinny; Katy found herself hard put upon to hold onto the prancing, frightened horse. From the corner of her eye, she caught a fast glimpse of a coiled snake just as Cerise dug her tiny hooves into the moist earth and lunged forward. At the lunge, Katy felt as if her neck had snapped and she screamed, grabbing hold of the flying mane with one hand and the skirt-covered horn with the other. Somehow she had lost the reins in the confusion. The ground seemed to fly beneath the pounding hooves of the small beast. Katy's eyes were transfixed upon the rapidly dissipating terrain. Her mouth felt as if it were sealed shut; she was too terrified to scream.

From behind came the thunder of Diablo's great hooves. Huge clods of earth flew from behind the pounding, horny casings digging into the terrain. Katy ventured a quick look backward. The great, black steed was stretched out full length, hooves digging into the ground as if pulling himself forward with each lunge. Jamie's face was ashen behind the dark scowl. He was hunched over the ebony gelding, lashing it with the small whip at each stride; white foam dribbled from Diablo's mouth in great droplets, saturating Jamie's boot and the horse's side.

Katy turned her attention forward, just in time to duck a low branch. She hung onto the mane and horn tighter as she felt herself slide slightly. Her aching leg gripped the leather-covered stump to which it was secured in a death-like grip.

A strong, steely arm encircled her waist roughly and

jerked her from the speeding horse. Twisting slightly, Katy threw trembling arms around her husband's neck, nearly choking him in her fear. He reined the great steed cruelly, sawing on Diablo's mouth with the iron bit in his anxiety for his terrified wife. Diablo snorted his anger and pain in protest of the unaccustomed heavy hand, coming to an abrupt halt.

Jamie dismounted, carried his overwrought wife to a grassy place, and laid her down. He felt at a loss as to what he should do for the weeping, sobbing girl. After watching her for a few indecisive moments, he knelt beside her and pulled her into his arms. She threw her arms around him once more, melting against him.

He struggled to keep the anger against the beast uppermost in his mind, as each sob jarringly reminded him of the soft, warm flesh he held tightly against his now throbbing chest. Pushing all selfish urges away, he murmured consoling words in her ear. It was only when he mentioned getting rid of the unpredictable animal that she pushed away from him.

"No!" Katy cried as she wiped her red, swollen eyes on the hem of her skirt, "It wasn't—Cerise's fault." She hiccupped. "A snake—frightened her." She shuddered at the memory of that repugnant reptile.

"A snake? Are you certain?"

She nodded, seeking in vain for a handkerchief.

He handed one to her, shaking his head. "You never have one when you need it."

Katy looked around as she blew her nose, searching for the frightened mare which had wandered away, then waited nervously as Jamie walked toward her leading the animal.

"Come here."

She shook her head; her heart beating wildly.

"Katy, there are only two ways to get back home. Either you ride or you walk. If you do not get back on this horse now, you never will. Now, get over here," he said sternly.

She hesitated, then walked slowly to the horse. Cerise's

flanks quivered from her fright; her tiny hooves pawed the soft dirt.

"She is as frightened as you are. Put your hand on her nose and reassure her," he ordered.

With a shaking hand, Katy started to touch the horse, but drew back quickly at an unexpected movement. Jamie frowned and his lips tightened slightly. Katy put forth her hand again, slowly. The soft, velvety nose met her hand and she rubbed the silken proboscis, Cerise whinnied softly and Katy nestled her head against the now quieting animal.

"See, Jamie, there is nothing wrong with Cerise, she was just frightened, as you said." She turned her emerald eyes upward.

He grinned crookedly and shook his head for now her unpredictable nature had returned and she was reassuring him. "Shall we go home, madam?" He slid his arm across her shoulders, giving her an affectionate hug, and they walked contentedly, with arms around each other, across the meadow toward the house in the far distance.

Chapter 19

With her confidence restored, Katy often found herself mounted on Cerise and the white stockinged feet would soon be pounding the ground carrying Katy to her husband's side.

Her duties at the big house seemed to take up too little of her time. Except for Richard, she had very little to do with the running of the house. Beulah was very efficient in that respect. After bathing the baby and doing a few necessary things for him, she was at a loss as to what to do. Richard slept most of the time and with Amanda nursing him, it seemed as if she were left out in the raising of her son until evening when he wanted to stay up and play with his parents.

Lord Bartlett was wont to seek her out, which made Katy anxious lest it get back to her husband. Thus it seemed natural to ride at Jamie's side and seek his companionship.

She watched a new Jamie emerge with each passing day. While at her side, he was gentle and loving. With the field hands, strict yet mindful of their needs. With his mother, respectful and caring. But with his father, the old Jamie was

ever present. Always on guard, never appearing to relax until they were separated by walls or distance.

A closeness had developed which Katy cherished. Even though she still irritated him by her undisciplined ways and curious nature, she knew that he loved her, though not yet consummately. His physical need for her was greater than his heartfelt love. There was still the terrible urge within to prove himself, although Katy couldn't understand this great need of his for verification, nor to whom it was directed. Surely not to her; he was everything she had ever dreamed about and more.

Not since the carefree days aboard the Hawk had he told her with fervent passion that he loved her. The passionate words now spoken over and over again were: "Katy, I need you, I want you."

She was unsure what the overburdening hold on him was. Sometimes she felt as if it was the upcoming mortgage on Fortune's Fancy. Then again it might be the terribly strained relationship with his mother and father.

Indian summer lingered on toward the last of October. The last of the tobacco was being processed for loading aboard the Hawk and Falcon when they returned.

Jamie stood beside his wife, his arm thrown lightly across her shoulders. Unconsciously, he caressed her cheek or toyed with a loosened curl. She moved closer to him and slipped her arm around his waist. He glanced down at her and cast a smile. She noted the smile touched only his lips; his eyes were remote and quickly returned to his silent scrutiny of the work being performed a few yards away.

The air was burdened with the fermented aroma of dried, blended tobacco. Katy's nose wrinkled in distaste at the odour which assaulted her senses, but she eagerly watched the step-by-step progress of the brown leaves. Her heart rejoiced as each sealed barrel was rolled into the storage sheds, for she knew they represented the redemption of Fortune's Fancy and the return of Jamie's good spirits. Memories of carefree days and happy moments aboard the

Hawk returned often to her worried mind, causing her to pray that nothing would hinder the precious cargo from being sold and that the money collected would be sufficient to satisfy the notes held against Jamie's inheritance.

Abruptly a terrible screeching noise rend the air. Katy frowned as the din crashed against her eardrums and covered her ears with both hands. Jamie grinned at the childish gesture and also at the thought that today they could try the new press for the first time. It had been brought from England late last year and hadn't had but a trial run. This year there would be a bumper crop to try it on.

"If it works half as well as they have claimed, I shall be satisfied. The manufacturers told me that I could pack three times as much tobacco into the hogsheads as we have been doing," he had informed Katy earlier. "We are so far away from everyone else, we have to do all of our processing here. From raising it, to making our own barrels and packing them, to shipping the product. I have shown you how we raise it, harvest it and cure it. Today you can see how we make the hogsheads in which we pack the tobacco."

The light pressure of his arm across her shoulder led her to the building where Cato and his crew were making the barrels. Thin wooden slats lay in piles all around the building. To one side were large stacks of saplings.

"The sides of the hogsheads are made from those thin slats, which they hold in a circle and tie with a rope to hold them together until the hoops are nailed on. They are made of split saplings. A cask gets five hoops. Two around each end and one in the middle." His deep voice was raised above the noise of the tobacco press. Katy smiled to herself as he explained each step as it was completed. It gave her the feeling he was tutoring her to be one of the crew. "Circular heads, which are made of slats, go into the ends. The bottom head goes in first and the hogshead is filled and then the top is put on. The tobacco is prised and is ready to ship." He grinned down at her.

"What do you mean, prised?"

"The press packs or prises the tobacco into the hogsheads." Then he patiently went on to further explain. "First, the slaves pack all the tobacco that they can in by hand and the barrel is laid on its side in the press, another one is placed in front of it. The top cask has no ends in it and is stuffed with tobacco by turning a great wooden screw with a rounded end into the filled cask. That is what's making all that noise. Then the screw pushes the tobacco out of the top cask into the bottom one, compressing it. The screw is then withdrawn and the barrel is sealed."

While explaining the process to her, he had led Katy to the prising shed where they now stood watching the new press in use. The great wooden plug screeched in agony as it turned slowly round and round. Katy pressed her hands tighter to her ears. The noise was deafening. Katy's head protested against the agonizing shrillness. As the moments passed a steady pounding commenced.

The press packed the tobacco into the large barrels as quickly as the slaves could push it into place. Even now the cask was being packed solid and would join these others on the side that awaited their turn to have the lid hammered on. It would then be taken with the rest to the sheds on the dock. Katy watched the great plug being carefully extracted; then the barrel was righted and the rest of the tobacco was packed on top by hand. Then two blacks rushed to the barrel and moved it to one side and laid another one down to take its place. They moved out of the building, Katy's ears still ringing from the earsplitting noise.

"It does become somewhat unbearable," Jamie commented on observing the look of irritation still upon her face.

"How do they stand it?"

"Some can't. Mostly, they stuff their ears with cotton. They tell me it helps somewhat."

Katy looked back into the darkened shed wondering how anyone could possibly take that horrendous noise for any length of time. Jamie stopped to talk to one of the negro

overseers and she watched the activity going on around her. There were about twenty-five or thirty blacks busily engaged in sundry duties, moving back and forth around her. Most of them were humming or whistling at their labours; all seemed to be happily engaged in what they were doing. As the master moved among them, they turned with ready smiles to his comments and observations. There was none of the discontent apparent here that Amanda warned of at the Woodruff farm. Katy felt completely at ease among these warm, friendly people. Jamie moved back to her side and took her by the elbow, leading her to the nearby dock.

He stood on the end of the dock, gazing out at the bay. A slight warming breeze blew across the aquamarine waters, stirring them into a lazy restlessness. Jamie's voice reached Katy's ear, sounding the same restless mood. "It is remarkable how the weather is holding up. The Negroes don't like the cold weather, they are more content working in this mild season or the hot sun."

"Does it get cold here?"

"Not as you have been accustomed to in England. The warm winds from the Caribbean Sea soften our winters and make them mild. Sometimes we get a hard winter but not usually, not as they do closer to the mountains or on the other side of them. We will get cold rain and perhaps a few snow flurries, but that is about all."

Taken by his quiet mood, Katy watched him silently and saw that his gaze was still upon the bay. "I'm glad to hear that, for I hate the cold and snow."

Turning his amused eyes upon her, he said teasingly, "Now I would have imagined you out enjoying the snow. Sliding in it, even jumping in it, not someone curled up in front of a blazing fire, wrapped in a shawl like a wizened woman seeking heat for her ancient bones."

Looking up at him with wistful emerald eyes, she remembered the lost youth she had observed others enjoying as she had grown up. "Oh, I enjoy the first snow, when you first awaken in the morning and look out and everything is

clothed in a virginal mantle; where no footstep has touched and as far as you can see the earth is pure and clean; the air is crisp and so cold it cuts your throat and lungs to breathe it. Then when the fires are stirred and the smoke and ashes blacken it and the footsteps mar it," she shrugged, lowering her voice to almost a whisper, "all the magic vanishes."

"I will look forward to curling up with you before a warming fire," he whispered, drawing her closer.

She smiled teasingly, "I have never curled up before a fire with a man before."

"Good." He grinned back, his dark eyes dancing, "I have a few things I am eager to teach you about curling up before a fire." With lighter heart, Katy was delighted to see his pensive attitude had vanished.

As they strolled arm in arm away from the dock the intimate spell was broken by the hustle-bustle around them and Jamie once more fell into a serious mood. The sheds were now packed tightly with the heavy barrels of tobacco and Jamie strode among them and the busy slaves with silent pride, giving advice and instructions for the coming morrow. The clang of the bell signaled the end of a long, weary day. Jamie and Katy watched the Hawk's crew board the dinghies and begin their long row to Hawk's Lair, while the Negroes climbed into waiting wagons. As the wagons slowly rolled down the dusty lane toward the slave quarters a melancholy chant rose in the warm Indian summer air, filling Katy with a strange sadness. The pier was oddly quiet and lonely. Katy saw his eyes move once more toward the open waters of Hopewell Bay and knew where his heart longed to be.

"When will Billy return? I miss him."

"As do I. After five or six years one does become attached to the feisty old barnacle. He has never been away from me since I—eh, found him in London. Funny . . . I never realized how much he missed the sea." He shook his head, trying to drive the depressive mood away. "At any rate, I expect him any day."

Jamie slipped his arms around her slim waist and Katy laid her head against his chest. In quiet contentment they watched the sun's blazing descent tint the placid waters, changing the aquamarine to sparkling shades of vermillion, reflected from the molten-red sky. Slowly the firmament changed to orange; specks of gold glittered on the gentle waves, then shimmered a warm pink as the sun slipped down behind the trees. When dusk fell, the faint rays of the setting sun cast forth their last feeble glow, causing the waters to shimmer a frail silvery blue.

Katy's heart quickened as Jamie restlessly clasped one hardened forearm below her bosom and rested there. She leaned back against him with a deep sigh and a loud thundering commenced in her ear. His warm breath lightly brushed the nape of her neck as he bent and pressed a kiss below her ear, sending shivers of anticipation down her spine. His embrace tightened around her and he struggled to control the passions buffeting him. She could feel his loins growing taut; a pulsating hardness jutted against her backside.

Turning to face him she saw the urgent, burning need in his eyes for a scant second before his mouth covered hers. Moist and warm lips, fevered and firm lips, gentle and tender lips. The urgency grew in him and his mouth moved upon hers with an almost vehement insistence.

He rained burning kisses upon her face and throat that left Katy breathless. Vaguely, through the mists of desire swirling around her own faltering senses, she heard his pleas come to her in a hoarse whisper, "Katy, I need you, I need you."

Caught up in the same violent need, her answer returned in a half-sob, half-moan, "Yes, Jamie, yes!"

Picking her up gently, he carried her down to a small grove of bushes along the shore. The verdant grass was soft and cool, rivaling the clean-sheeted feather bed at home. The odours of the last wild roses and honeysuckle perfumed the

fresh air. Katy's head whirled with the passions inflaming her.

He kissed her tenderly as he unloosed the hooks at the back of her dress. Soon their clothes lay in a tumbled mass.

Jamie wooed her tenderly. His lips were a gentle persuader. Gentle hands caressed her body with a knowledge born of love. His hard, lean frame moved against her and she felt the taut manly boldness warm against her thigh. Katy closed her eyes and sighed as his lips slowly traced along her throat and shoulders with a searing touch. His hand lightly stroked her breasts and the pink tinged nipples rose to meet his persistent fingers. Leisurely, his hand roamed downward across her flat, firm belly and rested upon the furry mound below. Tingling waves of excitement rushed through her and paused beneath his hand.

Jamie's eyes engulfed her and sent her brain into a reeling world of giddy intoxication. Shivers of delight raced up Katy's spine, before a surge of warmth flooded through her leaving her shaky and weak. She turned her face toward his and sought his mouth eagerly. Parted lips met in a whirl of passion and Katy felt as if her racing heart were transporting her to heights of ecstasy. The kiss, once gentle, now surged with the savage hunger of passionate impatience.

Katy arched against him with a low moan. Jamie's hand pressed her tighter against his aching loins and his lips were a brand as they moved across her breasts and the silky smoothness of her stomach. His teeth nibbled at her gently, leaving her panting and breathless. His dark eyes glowed with the consuming voracity raging inside him.

Her thighs opened willingly to receive him and a deep sigh escaped as he thrust inside her. Katy's pulse raced, filling her soul with an intense agony of delight. She felt as if she were unable to contain the soaring rapture that had plunged her into this gulf of bliss.

Jamie's heart thudded against her breast and his breath rushed against her ear in harsh, rasping gasps. She met each

plunge eagerly and with a lusty thrust of her own. Heated blood melted all reservations and impassioned fervour became a willing teacher. Her inflamed ardour matched his. Delight and surprise awakened and they were enclosed in the all-consuming embrace of flaming passion. Time soared toward infinity . . . and beyond. Rationality groped for the tottering rim of ecstasy. The faltering transport of rapturous delight strengthened, then held, returning the lovers to a saner sphere. Passion's burning fire slaked, enraptured bliss reposed upon the glowing altar of love.

They lay locked together in exhaustion and fulfillment, savouring each other's love and contentment. Finally, when strength returned, Jamie rolled off with a deep sigh and lay quietly beside her, his arm flung across her waist. His head rested against her breast and she tingled as she felt the warm air expelled across her bosom.

When the evening breezes cooled, they arose reluctantly and dressed. While Jamie went after the buggy, Katy tried to brush the grass and small twigs out of her loosened hair. She was brushing at her dress when Jamie drove up; Cerise was tied to the rear of the vehicle. He helped her into the buggy, giving her a tender pat on the bottom before she turned to sit down.

Katy looked around in the bright moonlight guiltily. Jamie threw back his head and laughed lustily, his teeth flashing in the terrestrial light. Sitting down beside her, he shook his head, still chuckling.

"We are married, my sweet, remember? We are not clandestine lovers, meeting behind our spouse's backs for a lusty toss in the grass." Katy smarted beneath the amusement in his voice.

"Jamie!" She could feel herself blushing.

He laughed softly, "Still the easily embarrassed young maiden, I see," and covering her hand with his large one, squeezed.

Mouthing a noise to the horse and slapping the reins against its back, they moved toward home. The moonlight

cast its silvery light on the surrounding countryside. Dark shadows reached out at the slowly moving buggy and the strange night sounds sent eerie chills up Katy's back. Fearfully, her eyes darted back and forth. She had never been intimidated by the night's darkness in England, but here, in America, the nights appeared blacker and certainly more ominous, what with the skulking predators and savages lurking everywhere. The noises that the night creatures made in Morpeth had always sounded friendly to her lonesome ears, but the cries and howls of the unknown at Fortune's Fancy were enough to frighten all but the fearless. She was certain that each tree and bush was a shadowy hiding place for a bloodthirsty Indian or vicious animal. In the daylight, when she was astride Cerise, the way from the wharf to the big house never appeared to be long enough for her. In the inky blackness, she felt they would never reach the security of home and lights. Moving closer to her husband's side, she slipped her hand under his arm and nestled against him for safety and comfort; his muscle bunched up beneath her grasp and he reached across with the other hand and gave a reassuring pat.

Finally, through the trees Katy could see the warm glow of the lights welcoming them through the huge windows. The night chill crept across her slender shoulders at a sudden gust of wind and she hugged Jamie's arm tightly. She returned his smile as he bent to kiss her on the tip of her nose.

"Well, my little brave soul, we are home at last," he said lightly.

At the word "home" Katy's heart felt an inner warmth. With thoughts of the wonderful day she had spent with Jamie still filling her soul with a joy unequaled, she felt that warmth spread through her like warm honey. Silently, she prayed that that happiness could be hers forever. Her sparkling eyes rivaled the glittering night sky and Jamie smiled to himself as his mind swirled with thoughts of what the coming evening would hold for the two of them.

"Yes..." she whispered joyously, "yes, we are home," it

was as if for the first time the word held a fullness of meaning for Katy.

"You go on up, love, I have some instructions for Rufus." Reaching up, he grasped her waist and handed her down.

In the pale moonlight, she could see Amanda's brother hurrying toward them. She returned his smile as she passed him and ran up the few steps that led into the house. Her heart was singing with happiness and as she opened the door she was humming a lilting ditty whose words escaped her for the moment. Walking quickly across the long hall, she looked upward to the closed door of her apartment, wondering if Richard was still awake. As her hand closed over the smooth, wooden railing and her foot found the bottom step, someone stepped out of the shadows.

"Home at last, my dear?" Her father-in-law's face wore a satirical smile. "I can see you have had an enjoyable time."

Katy cocked her head to one side inquisitively.

"As I have told you before, no finesse," his hand moved to her hair, Katy drew back slightly. Smirkingly, the arrogant lord withdrew a small twig from her tousled mass of hair. "Lesson two in the art of love is definitely in order—and soon." He told her softly. "Once I have demonstrated, you will never wish to return to these childish quick romps in the woods." His hand covered hers on the railing.

Katy tried to withdraw her hand, but the grasp tightened and the degrading smile widened.

"Please, M'Lord, remove your hand. My husband will be in shortly."

"Yes, M'Lord, remove your filthy hands from her, for her husband is already here." A cold, furious voice sounded from the doorway and Jamie strode across the hall to stand near his wife.

Katy jerked her hand away and stepped back.

"Ah, Jamie."

"Don't 'Ah, Jamie' me, you damnable lecher! I have been wondering how long it would take you to make your advances toward my wife. I am surprised you have waited so long." His scornful voice filled the hallway.

"What makes you think I have waited?" Lord Bartlett taunted mockingly.

Jamie's black scowl was murderous and he made a low growl in his throat and moved forward. "You filthy..."

"Jamie!" Katy screamed and threw herself between the two men. "He's baiting you, nothing has happened! I swear it!"

Jamie shoved her aside and continued forward.

"Jamie, for God's sake, he is your father! Nothing has happened between us!" She grabbed his arm and hung on.

The house servants appeared out of the shadows one by one and watched curiously.

Clinging desperately to his arm, Katy continued trying to reason with the wrathful man, "Don't, Jamie, please! There's no need for this insanity; please, believe me!"

The two men appraised each other. The older stood with his arms folded across his chest, leaning lazily against the railing, with the perpetual amused smile he wore when around his son at the corners of his mouth.

The younger man was like a tightened spring ready to unwind explosively, his dark eyes blazing with hatred; hard, tight lines marking his mouth and eyes; hands clenching tightly and relaxing at his side. Presently, through the angry roaring in his ears, he could hear his wife pleading with him.

"Stay away from my wife, you bastard, or I shall kill you!" he threatened tersely.

"Are you challenging me, Jamie? Perhaps another short lesson with the rapier may be in order one day soon."

Jamie stiffened at the taunt. "Don't think me still a young novice with the blade, M'Lord, for you will be deceiving yourself. If the time does arrive for us to face each other with swords there will be no lessons given! Killing with a blade has been my profession for ten years, and it will be my pleasure to pin you to the wall like an insect!" His low caustic voice cut the close air like a knife.

The smile slowly disappeared as the harsh words derided the older man and he studied his angry son with narrowed eyes. As the biting challenge was cast, His Lordship bowed

slightly and then raised hardened eyes. "Perhaps we shall never know," he murmured softly and stepped aside.

Jamie marched up the stairs, eyes straight ahead and back rigid, Katy following. At the head of the stairs, she ventured a backward glance. The smile once more marked the handsome face below and he threw her a kiss nonchalantly and bowed again.

Once they were behind closed doors Jamie turned and faced her. Anger still darkened his face, the ebony eyes blazing with an intense blackness. His mouth was twisted with jealousy and rage. The vein in his forehead jutted out.

"What the hell is going on between you and my illustrious father?" he snapped.

She looked at him, stunned at the insinuation. "Why—nothing."

"Nothing!" he shouted. "Do you think I failed to notice the courtly bow and the gently blown kiss? Do you think I am stupid! I have warned you that he seduces every woman within his grasp. In his arrogance, he persists until they succumb, in their infinite weakness, to his every whim! Are you trying to tell me that you are any different from the rest!"

"Jamie, I love *you*."

"Lord God Almighty, woman! Love has nothing to do with it!"

She turned to walk away from him. "As angry as you are, I refuse to discuss it."

Grabbing her by the hair, he jerked her to him. "We *shall* discuss it—here and now!"

Her hand, as if with a mind of its own, lashed out across his face and echoed in her ears as her eyes widened in horror at what she had done.

Jamie's face paled a deathly white and his hand caught her beside the head. She felt herself swept across the room, landing against the wall half-stunned, with ears ringing; red and silver flashes sparkled against her eyelids. Jerking her to her feet, he shook her roughly. "What kind of a fool do you take me for?" he demanded.

She tried to reply angrily as he continued to shake her violently.

"I take you—for the kind—of a fool—you are—trying—to make of—yourself," she yelled at him.

The biting hold on her arms continued as he scowled at her.

"Please, release me. You are hurting my arms," she whispered.

With a vile oath, he thrust her away and walked to the window. Drawing back the heavy draperies, he looked out into the night-blackened sky. The silence was overwhelming after the vehemence which had gone before.

Katy rubbed her bruised arms, watching him. He stood rigid with no sign of relenting. She knew the dark look which masked his face even without seeing it. The muscle in his jaw contracted spasmodically.

"Do you think I don't know what goes on between him and my half-brothers' wives?" His voice was thick with emotion.

"I am not one of your brother's wives," she snapped.

"They no doubt felt the same as you in the beginning. His evil is worse than Lucifer's, and his power, as far as women are concerned, is as great; even stronger. At least Lucifer did not commit incest and divide families in the bedroom."

She gasped. "I think you are insane," she whispered hoarsely.

"Perhaps I am." He turned to her. "Now at least, I have an idea of what hell my mother has gone through all these years." His voice which had been a low, furious monotone, now rose in anguish, "God Almighty, when will it end?" He ground his fist into his hand. "Only when he is dead!" he growled through clenched teeth.

Katy watched the frenzied man fearfully. He stared at her intently, eyes blazing with a glint of madness, then began to move toward her slowly, stalking her, making her feel like a trapped animal. She retreated before him, horrified at the predatory aura which surrounded him. In her hysteria he

reminded her of one of the black house cats she had watched the other day as it crept up on a small bird with a broken wing. The sleek cat had moved with a smooth, menacing grace, slowly guiding the terrified bird in the direction he had wanted it to go by the movement of his body, either by moving to the right or left. The terror-stricken creature had fluttered or limped in the direction demanded of it by the nefarious predator, cheeping piteously. She had reached the pathetic bird just in time. From the deep recesses of her soul, she heard the scream, "Dear God in heaven, where is my saviour?"

She glanced quickly behind her and found that he, even as the cat had done, had guided her into a dead end. From the derisive look on his face she knew he was enjoying the agony he was inflicting upon her. Katy's throat was dry and she felt as if she were suffocating, almost as if his fingers were tightening around her throat slowly, choking off the life-sustaining air.

His strong hands tightened around her bruised arms once more and his face thrust close to her own.

"If I knew for a certainty that that lecherous bastard had laid hands upon you..." his words rose in his throat, choking off the vile threat. "No one will ever touch you; you are mine! Do you understand me!" His voice was no more than a whisper, but it lashed out at Katy with a bite as keen as a whip.

His mouth crashed down upon hers cruelly; despoiling, looting her of all strength and emotion. Hanging limply in his strong hands, she closed her eyes, trying to shut out the horrible, despicable scene confronting her.

When his lips moved across her face and down her throat and his hands suddenly began caressing her in an angry passionate manner, her eyes flew open.

"No one will ever have you but me, my sweet, no one... no one..." he murmured thickly. His eyes gleamed strangely, as if from a fever.

Anger took root at the pit of her stomach and grew,

sending out tentacles in all directions as a cold fury budded and suddenly blossomed into a full blown rage. With a sharp cry of wrathful indignation she shoved him away. He stumbled backwards a few steps, a look of complete amazement upon his face.

"You—you damnable brute! You dare to call your father every despicable name that rises to your lips, not once giving thought that those same names describe you!"

His nostrils flared and his mouth twisted in a cruel line. "You dare to defend him—to me!" Jamie shouted furiously.

"Someone needs to!" she shouted back.

"Are you trying to tell me that he has applied his wily ways to you and you—you—" His anger was so intense he could go no further.

"Think what you will . . . *M'Lord*," she flung at him, "for you usually do anyway!"

"I forbid you to have anything more to do with him! I forbid it!" His voice returned to the familiar low menacing tone he normally used when angry. "And as for His Lordship—he can get out—bag and baggage!"

"You can't do that! He owns..."

"He owns nothing here!"

"But—but the land..."

"Stop it, Katy. I will not have you defending him!" He grabbed her by the shoulders, giving her a forceful shake. "I told you once before that rebellion will not be borne in my own bedroom. That law will never change. There will be only one male Bartlett seeking gratification in your bed, madam!" He shoved her backwards onto the bed and stood over her glowering.

"Do not touch me, Jamie. I told you that I will not be used. I will not allow rape again," she threatened.

"Ah, the little tiger is going to try her claws," he taunted. "No, not tonight, my love. Anger makes a poor lover and bedfellow. There is always later when the blood cools." He shrugged carelessly. "But then there are always other beds to reheat it with the fires of passion."

Her countenance paled; she felt as if he had struck her. "After tonight, after what we had—you could do that to me?"

His mouth twisted in loathing, "After what my father intimated and you have refused to deny? Why not?"

"Jamie, I swear there has been nothing between your father and myself." Her limbs felt weak and the pulse in her throat throbbed so hard she could scarcely breathe. An overwhelming sense of faintness hovered over her. Then from the dark recesses of her mind, the memory of a tender, passionate kiss fingered its way into her agonizing soul and she felt her face burn with the memory of that kiss.

His visage darkened at her guilty look and a feeling of disgust washed over him. "Your face tells me a different story, madam," he retorted bitterly. "I was certain with you it would be different. But all women are cut from the same cloth, have the same devious minds, the same cheating hearts and the same deceitful mouths. My grandfather spoke the truth, after all." For the first time Jamie felt defeated in the lifetime struggle waged between him and his father. His blood froze at the malignant thought, chilling the scorching anger boiling through his body, leaving behind an emptiness never known before. Dejectedly, he turned and walked to the door.

"No, Jamie, don't go. You are wrong. I swear it," Katy cried.

"There is nothing left to say, Katy. My father has finally won." He closed the door softly behind him.

Katy slid off the bed and ran to the door, jerking it open, "Jamie, wait. Please, don't go," she pleaded. "I love you, I love you."

Below, she heard the front door close and silence enveloped the sombre house.

The long, lonely night was finally over, followed by a drab and cheerless morn. Great dark clouds covered the pearl-grey sky. In one agonizing night, the warm, gay Indian summer had fled before the cold, dreary wintry day. It was as

if the weather sensed the bleak atmosphere surrounding the house and tried to match the day to fit the gloom.

Katy lay numb with grief and shock. She knew that she would never feel anything else again. Everything in the world seemed to have stopped. Nothing moved. Everything lay cold and lifeless and heavy laden, even as her heart. She wondered if she were dying. Could one possibly die of a broken heart?

Moving only her eyes, she looked around the room. She was surprised that they moved for they felt lifeless. Her body was paralyzed with remorse, as if all that made up the person called Katy Coswell Bartlett had fled. She had never realized that grief could consume so completely everything that was called life and leave a cold, empty shell in its place. Knowing that life was going on around her, she nevertheless paid it scant attention.

She would never forget the look of defeat on Jamie's face as he had walked out the door. Once more she envisioned him walking dejectedly down the hall, down the stairs, through the hall and out the door, closing it softly. Her cries of endearment had echoed against silent walls and empty corridors. No one knew where her husband was. Three days had passed and the master of Fortune's Fancy was still missing. Fear clutched her heart with an icy grasp, causing it to show more life in that one instant than she had felt in days.

"Where is he?" her mind screamed. "Oh, God, never would I believe he would act so resigned. Anger, rage, even cruelty, but never submission. Jamie, please, *please*, come home to me." Tears welled and ran onto the pillow.

As the day progressed it took on a more dismal mantle. The air in the house grew heavy, ominous. Every move, every thought seemed stifled. Fear crept through the house. Katy, closed up in her silent, lonely room, sensed it.

Amanda entered the bedroom silently and checked her mistress. Believing Katy asleep, she started to leave reluctantly.

Katy turned her face toward the retreating figure. "Did

you want me, Amanda?"

"Oh, Missy, I'm so glad yo is awake. We gotta find de Cap'n." She wrung her hands.

"What is the trouble?" Katy asked anxiously.

"We gotta find de Master." Her eyes grew larger with fright.

"Stop this nonsense, Amanda. Now, tell me what is the trouble?" Katy demanded sharply.

"Yo ain't heard what Mr. Amos done last night?" Katy shook her head. "It's bad, Missy. All de nigger's air fightin' mad."

"My God, girl, tell me if it is that terrible." Katy rose to the side of the bed fearfully.

"He was terrible drunk, Missy. First, he beat his wife sumpthin' awful, near ter killed'er. One of de field hands tried ter help'er and Mr. Amos—he shot'im."

"He killed him?" she questioned, dreading the answer.

"Yes, Missy," she whispered.

"Then what happened?"

"Some of de new niggers the old master bought last is from de Battu tribe. Dey's born fierce and mean. Dey's holdin' a meetin' tonight back along Wolf Creek and dey's gonna—oh, Missy," she wailed. In her terror, Amanda had slipped back into the idiom of her people, forgetting to copy the speech of her mistress.

"What are they going to do, Amanda?" Katy tried to keep the terror out of her voice.

"Dey's gonna make juju."

"Juju? What is that?" Katy asked, almost relieved.

"Bad medicine, Missy."

"What do you mean, bad medicine?" Katy felt as if each explanation had to be pulled from the girl and she fought to keep the anger from sounding in her voice.

"Dey holds a council of war and makes a powerful magic and den decides—"

"Decides what?" Katy demanded shrilly.

"Whether he lives'er dies. I tried ter tell de master about Mr. Amos, but he wouldn't listen ter me. De new niggers wants ter be free. Dey figgers de only way is ter kill eberybody who don't jine 'em." She wrung her hands in anguish. "Dat mean all de whites and house slaves. We jist gotta find de Cap'n, Missy." Tears coursed down her cheeks and Katy put her arms around the terrified girl and tried to calm her fears as well as her own.

"Where are we to look for him? Rufus and Adam have searched everywhere, I thought."

"Maybe he's gone ter Hawk's Lair."

"Yes, that is an idea. He said he was expecting the Falcon at any time. Help me dress. We must find someone to send there."

As they descended the stairs Katy became aware that the house was empty and silent.

"Where is everyone?"

"Dey's scared and ebeyone's gone home and locked de doors."

"Do you mean that no one is here?"

"Jist Beulah and her family. Dey's in de kitchen."

Katy led the way into the diningroom. The table and sideboard stood bare. She entered the pantry. Everything was neat and in its proper place, yet mealtime was just past and there was no sign of food or preparation of a meal. When had all the confusion begun, Katy wondered. She opened the pantry door and stepped out into the breezeway which separated the kitchen from the house. The few steps were hurriedly taken and Katy opened the kitchen door, stepping inside.

Except for Apollo, all of Beulah's family and Amanda's brother, Rufus, were sitting at the long table. Their heads were close together and they were whispering. As Katy entered, the men jumped quickly to their feet, turning anxious eyes on her.

"Missy, praise de Lord. I'se glad yo is better," Beulah

cried. "Dere's turrible things happening."

"Yes, Amanda told me. Does anyone know where my husband is?"

They looked at one another, shaking their heads.

"Rufus, you must ride to Hawk's Lair and see if he is there."

"Oh, no, Missy," he rolled his eyes in fright, "not me. I'se too scared ter leave de house."

"Nonsense, we have got to find Jamie."

"Send Adam, he ain't scared'a nothin'."

"I want Adam to search the wharf area—just everywhere, anywhere." She fought to keep the panic out of her voice.

"Don't make me go, Missy," Rufus pled.

Adam grabbed his arm and shook him roughly. "Shut up. Yo do as yo is told or I'll break yo arm off."

Rufus nodded his head repeatedly.

"I will write you a note, Rufus. If my husband is not there, put it on Billy's door so Jamie can find it when he returns. Just a moment."

She ran back into the house to the library. Looking around quickly, wishing, hoping Jamie had returned; but the room was as silent as the rest of the house. His desk was as he had left it. Papers stacked in neat piles, pens in holders and the ink well closed.

She hurriedly wrote a terse note for Rufus to deliver. As frightened as he was, she wanted to make sure the message was accurately and clearly understood.

She reread the message to reassure herself:

'Jamie, we are in danger. The slaves are planning open rebellion. Something which they call juju. Hurry, we need you!

Your wife and son.'

Holding up her skirts, she ran down the hallway. Inside the kitchen, the two men were dressed in jackets and waiting for her.

"Now don't forget, fasten this to the door if the Master is not there so he can see it when he returns."

"Yas'um," Rufus told her sullenly.

"Please hurry, both of you, and please be careful."

When the two had left, Beulah fixed a pot of tea and they sat at the table, without speaking, drinking their tea, and waiting.

Time dragged by silently, ominously. Katy and Amanda had brought the babies downstairs and made a comfortable bed for them in the corner by the large cast-iron cookstove where it was warm. They were sleeping peacefully, black beside white, as if it were a normal, tranquil day.

Katy had risen several times, looking out the window to see if anyone was coming. A tense, brooding quiet settled across the house. Each ear strained for the hint of a friendly sound. The wind had ceased, the birds were quiet, the barnyard animals were hushed.

A ringing vibration of iron striking stone brought everyone quickly to their feet. Katy ran to the door, Amanda was on her heels. She pushed both hands against the door.

"Wait, Missy, we needs ter see who it is first," she whispered fearfully.

Beulah pulled the curtains back and furtively looked out. A sigh of relief escaped her. She turned to them with a wide grin on her face, "It's Adam."

Everyone crowded out of the house. Katy stopped in her tracks, a stunned look upon her face. Adam was holding Jamie in front of him on the horse, but a Jamie she never expected to see. His shirt was stained and torn, barely hanging on him. With one sleeve almost ripped off, it hung open to the waist. His breeches were covered with mud, bare feet dangling loosely, mud clinging to his ankles. He appeared to be unconscious. When she could look up into his face she saw that he was unshaven and dirty. Blood-shot eyes blinked open.

"Hullo, Katy," he mumbled thickly.

Incredulously, she stared at the dishevelled man grinning at her with the look of a fool upon his face. "Dear Lord in heaven . . . he's intoxicated," she gasped.

"He sho is, Missy," Adam agreed with a grin. He swung down from the horse, holding Jamie in the saddle with one great hand against his bare chest, then reaching up, he pulled the big man across his shoulders.

"Sorry, ma'am I had a little trouble gittin'im ter come with me. It's awful muddy and I had a little struggle at furst. He kinda fell and hit 'is head, then it was a little easier."

"Put him in bed and then bring plenty of strong, black coffee and a cold bath," Katy told Adam with disgust.

"Yas, Missy."

"I will never forgive him for this," she mumbled following Adam through the house and up the stairs. "I have been half out of my mind with worry and he has been forgetting everything with his bloody head in a bottle. Oh-h!" she exclaimed angrily, unable to think of any word vile enough to express her disapprobation. "Where did you find him, Adam?" she demanded.

"Ah-h," his eyes rolled as his brain searched for some way to avoid an answer, then quickly asked, "Did yo'all say ter put him on de bed, Missy?"

"Yes, yes," she answered irritably. "Where . . ."

"He's powerful dirty, ma'am, I'll hurry wid de water."

"And the coffee, do not forget the coffee," she called to the fleeing man.

She stood over Jamie disgustedly. As she struggled to undress him she did so disdainfully. Her face was screwed up in repulsion. Not only was he dirty, he had a foul, pungent odour about him. As Calab and Adam brought in the water, Beulah followed with the coffee. "Whoe, do he stink!" Beulah exclaimed, wrinkling her nose.

Katy held his shirt between two fingers and dropped it to the floor. "Phew! Smells like he has been sleeping with the pigs."

The two men looked at each other uneasily. Adam and Calab hurried to help Jamie into the tub.

Jamie let out a gasp as the water crept around him. "Get away," he grumbled drunkenly. "What are you trying to do, you black bastard, freeze me to death?" he asked through thickened tongue. "Let me up!" he demanded as Katy pushed on his shoulders, helping to hold him down.

"What is going on here? Where is everyone?" Jamie's father demanded from the doorway. "God's eyes, what has happened to him?" He raised his nose and sniffed. "And where in the hell is that smell coming from? It smells like a whore house in here."

All eyes turned to Katy as she gasped. She paled and swayed. Adam caught her and held her closely. Lord Bartlett raced to his side, shoving the slave aside. Beulah was the only one who saw the look of raw hatred pass her son's eyes. His Lordship led Katy to a chair and helped her to sit down.

"Where did you find him, Adam? I want an answer to my question this time," Katy told him tonelessly.

Adam looked at his parents for assistance, concern written on his face. He didn't want to hurt the young mistress. She had always been kind to him.

"Damm it, answer her, boy." Lord Bartlett growled angrily.

"At Carey's cabin," he answered reluctantly and sullenly.

"Who is Carey?" Katy asked in that same lifeless voice.

Adam bit his lip and sighed loudly. "She used ter be one of de field hands on Mr. Amos's farm."

"What do you mean, used to be?"

"Well—uh—she's pregnant now and don't do nothin'."

"Pregnant—you mean—" Katy looked at her sleeping husband painfully and covered her mouth with her hand.

"Oh, no, mam. It's my baby," Adam protested.

"But you are not sure, are you?"

Adam looked at the floor.

Lord Bartlett laughed with amusement. "Oh, this is inane.

He has always regarded me with scorn, but I have never had to stoop so low as to lie with a darkie." He moved across the room and stood over his son with a contemptuous look on his face. With a derisive laugh, he caught Jamie by the hair and pushed him under the water, holding him there for a few seconds. Jamie came up sputtering and cursing.

His father dunked him again and again. "Wake up, you drunken sot, or I will drown you!"

They took turns walking the intoxicated man and pouring coffee into him until he refused angrily. "Not another drop!" he thundered. "I am about to burst as it is." He staggered over behind the screen and relieved himself.

When he returned, he looked at everyone, letting his glare rest on each hostile eye. "Why are we all gathered together in my bedchamber, pray tell? Can't we have a family gathering in the drawing room where most genteel people meet?"

By this time his mother and three female servants had joined them. "Jamie, they are going to kill us," she cried, her voice quivering in terror.

He put his hand up, as if warding off her shrill voice, "Please, Mother, not so loud. Who is going to kill us?"

From the distant shore of Wolf Creek came the sound of drums. Jamie's lowered head came up in disbelief.

"Juju," the Negroes muttered fearfully, moving closer together.

"Juju? What the hell is juju?" Lord Bartlett demanded.

"It is a holy war. A rebellion," Jamie cursed. "Now I know why there was so much good English brandy and nigger hooch and other favours readily available." He muttered more to himself than to those around him.

"What are you mumbling about?" his father asked harshly.

"That is not important now. We have got to try to stop this before it gets completely out of hand." He turned to Adam. "Where is your brother?"

Adam shrugged and refused to look his master in the eye.

"I need one of you with me and one to guard the women."

"Take him with you. I will guard the women. I do not trust him—now," his father snarled, eyeing the Negro accusingly.

"And what makes you think that I trust you, M'Lord?" Jamie sneered.

His father scoffed, "Do you really believe you can stand in judgment upon me now, the way you have comported yourself these last few days?"

Jamie's face hardened and he turned away quickly. "Adam, you saddle two horses and I will be down directly." He turned to Katy, taking her by the arm, he led her to his coffer on the other side of the room. Opening the drawer, he took out a set of pistols. Katy wondered why she should notice that they were a matched set and made of a shining ornate metal, with beautiful carved ivory handles, lying in nests of deep red velvet. He handed one of them to Katy after checking it closely, making sure it was loaded.

"Jamie, I don't know how to use one of these. Besides, I could never bear to shoot anyone."

"It isn't for just anyone, Katy. It is for you."

"Me?" Her face held a painful expression.

"If they should break in, Katy," he swallowed at the knot lodging in his throat, then forced himself to go on, "I want you to use it, please." His anguished eyes looked across the room at his father. Their eyes locked for a moment, a look of understanding passing between them. "My father will show you how." His eyes searched hers. She saw that his were filled with pain and remorse. Taking her in his arms, he embraced her closely, his lips touching her face several times gently. He held her damp cheek against his and his voice whispered in a contrite strain, "Katy, I love you very much. I don't know what else to say to you except that, and to tell you that I am terribly sorry I have hurt and dishonoured you in my conduct. You must believe me. I don't know why I did what I did, except I wanted to hurt you deeply." He paused and sighed, "I am certain that I have achieved my purpose."

Her heart cried out to him in her love. All anger and resentment fled, leaving only fear behind. Fear that they would never see one another again. He kissed her once more. His lips were hard and bruising upon hers, then he wrenched away from her and strode across the room to his father, handing him the other gun. No words passed their lips. They stood and measured each other silently, each wondering if the duel between them would be ended this night. Lord Bartlett stuck the gun under his arm and reached out his hand. Jamie hesitated, and started to turn from his sire. Then on second thought, took the proffered hand. His father covered it with his other hand. A gentle smile touched his lips. "God go with you—my son," his voice wavered.

Jamie frowned and nodded, then quickly turned on his heel and left.

Lord Bartlett turned to the others. "We must make sure that all windows and doors are locked and bolted. Beulah, you and Delcy fetch food and water and bring it upstairs. Amanda, get the babies into the nursery and you and Rose take care of them. Cissy, you help Beulah. Calab, you and Rufus and I will take care of the doors and windows now."

"What can I do to help?" Katy asked.

"You and Valentine stay here." He placed the pistol in his wife's lax hand, closing it over the ivory handle. His eyes gentled and he caressed her cheek with his hand and kissed her tenderly. "Katy will take care of you, my dear, until I return." When he moved away to follow Calab and Rufus downstairs, Katy noted Lady Bartlett's terror-stricken eyes.

Chapter 20

The clock chimed ten o'clock as Katy went to the window and looked out for at least the hundredth time. Jamie and Adam had been gone for only a few hours, yet to her anguished mind it seemed like an eternity. Where were they? What was taking them so long?

Clouds obscured the moon. The silver orb seemed to dart in and out among them, casting long dark shadows on the spacious lawn below. The sky appeared lighter than the last time she had looked. She raised her eyes eastward towards the Woodruff farm. The night sky was ablaze. She leaned farther out of the window. Filling the ebony world were tongues of flame; already the air was filled with the acrid smell of smoke.

"Oh my God!..They're burning Amos' farm." Lady Bartlett gasped.

Katy stared in horror at the distant holocaust and her brain kept repeating, "It's begun, Father in heaven, it's begun!"

As the night progressed the drums kept beating their monotonous rhythm, filling the air with the horrific message of violence, rapine and death. The droning beat crept nearer and nearer. The nigrescent mantle of night had been consumed by the advancing conflagration, warning the barricaded defenders of the enemies' position. The sky blazed red, orange and yellow. Giant tongues of devouring fiery devastation lapped at the withered acres hungrily, leaping high into the sky in sudden outbursts of effulgent satisfaction.

For the most part, silence had settled over the small group huddled together in the large bedroom for strength and security. Katy's heart felt as if it had shriveled up into a small, hard knot; her pulse matched the hypnotic beat of the drums. She tried to restrain the uncontrollable quivering which now possessed her and the irrational feeling that if the drums ceased their beat each one of terrified group would die immediately. Her eyes made a full circle of the room.

Lady Bartlett's maids sat in a corner near Beulah, rocking back and forth, moaning and whining until Katy thought she would go mad.

"Shet up over dere or I'se gonna take a strop ter yo and give yo somethin' ter whine about," Beulah snapped.

Lady Bartlett appeared to be in a world all her own. She sat in a chair staring straight ahead out of vacant eyes. Her hands hugged the pistol that Thomas had given her tightly against her breast. Calab and Rufus had their muskets clutched in rigid hands. Their eyes were dilated with fear.

Amanda sat in the doorway between the bedroom and nursery. Her head was tilted back against the door frame, eyes closed. Katy could see the pulse in her throat beating rapidly. Jamie's father stood at the window, peering out through the heavy velvet hangings draping the elongated window, the long barreled rifle in his hand. The fetid odour of panic invaded the room beneath the cracks in the bolted door and through the open window where the older man stood guard.

In the distance, overshadowed by the droning beat of the drums, a deep-toned flowing murmur could barely be heard. Katy felt the hair at the nape of her neck tingle and everyone began talking at once, then demanding and begging to be told what that frightening sound was.

"Be quiet! Listen!" Lord Bartlett commanded.

The room became deathly silent. Not even the whispering sighs of breathing were heard. The purling slowly grew in volume and terror held out a beckoning hand. Katy put her hands over her ears to seal out the ghostly sough. She watched gooseflesh rise up on her arms as the chilling fingers of fear crept over her body.

"What is it, Masta?" the frightened servants cried. Their dark faces were veiled in a greyish hue and dominated by fear-filled eyes.

Lord Bartlett mentally shook himself, trying to rid his mind of the sinister grasp in which the evil susurrations held him. He waved his hand in a silencing motion and the room became hushed once more.

Of a sudden, the drums ceased and the crisp night air rang with the shouting cries of hundreds of voices which continued for several minutes. Then a deep silence followed.

Katy drew shaking knees up against her chest and lowered her forehead to rest upon them, not wanting anyone to see how terrified she was. Knowing that in a few hours all who shared the horror of this dreadful night would be murdered, she closed her eyes tightly and prayed. At her side she could hear her mother-in-law saying her rosary. The Negroes had gathered around Beulah and the Lord's Prayer rose in a flowing murmur.

Suddenly there was a faint scream of agony, which echoed repeatedly. The women recognized the message as the age-old feminine cry of the vanquished. Terror clutched at each of them; the girls in the corner began moaning once more. Katy felt a strong compulsion to join them, but forceably pushed it away. Loud masculine voices sounded above the shrill screams. The victors' cries rose in triumph and lust, the

vanquished in terror and agony.

With heartbreaking speed, the bedlam came closer, closer, until it was at the door. The massive oaken barrier was no hindrance against the heavy blows which pounded against it. The obstruction splintered with a great rending crash. A multitude of voices split the air in triumph.

Lord Bartlett leaned the rifle against the doorjam and drawing his sword from the scabbard, stood blocking the doorway. Katy was astonished to see a familiar dark scowl suddenly mask his face. Gone was the visage of the bored English dandy. The deceiving foppish mask was torn asunder. In its place, stood rather a whole man; a virile, courageous man. Katy was stunned, for she had thought him incapable of manly attributes.

The front door suddenly burst open. Katy watched from behind her father-in-law as the hall was swiftly filled with black men. Dark angry eyes searched them out.

She felt fear bubble up into her throat as the mob parted and someone was shoved forward. His arms were bound tightly behind his back. He stumbled and fell to his knees from the force of the shove. As he struggled to his feet, Katy was horrified to see that it was her husband. His face was streaked with mud and blood and drawn in pain and exhaustion. He was bare from the waist up and his back and chest were criss-crossed with scarlet welts from the bite of the whip. A large Negro stood behind Jamie holding him up by the ropes that bound him. The black glared his hatred at the whites looking down upon him. With a deliberate, arrogant pose which revealed the heavy, muscular and woolly chest beneath a sleeveless leather jerkin, he yanked the ropes higher, forcing Jamie's hands up between his shoulder blades. Jamie's face paled and he grimaced from the pain. The leader's bicep bunched into a huge, tight knot as he pushed his master into a painful position. The Captain was compelled to bend at the waist and his hands were forced outward, until they were perpendicular to his shoulder blades. White teeth gleamed brightly in a wide smile when

the leader heard the white man grunt sharply from the spasms coursing through his arms. With a loud cry the black man forced his captive's arms higher and Jamie thought that his arms and shoulders were on the verge of parting company. His head whirled and for an instant he felt as if he might faint. Sweat polished the ebony skin of the rebel beside him as if it had been waxed and the Negro preened before his shouting followers, dragging the Captain painfully behind him as he marched in front of them with a bobbing stride. A chant in a foreign language burst from his lips and soon the hallway was filled with the ominous singing.

Suddenly the man released the painful hold on the prisoner and Jamie stumbled to his knees. His shoulders sagged in fatigue and agony, but when he met Katy's eyes she saw the raw hatred blazing from the ebony glare. She screamed and tried to get past Jamie's father, but he forcibly blocked her way.

"Send de Mistress down to her man," the leader commanded.

"Tobias, what the hell is going on down there?" Lord Bartlett shouted.

"Not Tobias no more. Nimbutu. Chief of all dese warriors." His arm swept the room.

"What is all this nonsense? Let my son go and lay down those damned knives and go back to your homes!"

"And become slaves again? Animals dat walk 'round on two legs? No more!" The mob behind him shouted, "No more, no more!" Nimbutu silenced them with an abrupt move of his hand. "We is men. We will lib like men or die like men, but we will be men! Send de woman down!"

"Go to hell!"

Nimbutu brought his large fist down heavily across Jamie's shoulders, knocking him to the floor, then jerked him to his feet again by the ropes.

"Send de woman down!"

"Stay where you are," Jamie croaked, forcing the words through bruised and broken lips.

"Oh, my God, Jamie! I must go to him, please, let me go!" Katy screamed:

Lord Bartlett held her tightly and she struggled against him, "No! You will stay where you are, you little fool!"

"We want de woman or yer son dies," Nimbutu threatened.

The scowl tightened and the eyes hardened. "Over my dead body!"

"Very well, yer Lordship," Nimbutu replied scornfully. "Dat will be *my* pleasure."

"Let me kill de son," a deep voice behind him thundered and Apollo stepped out of the rabble.

A contemptuous smile crossed Nimbutu's face. "Ah, yes, de nigger stud. Why do yo want his life when he gave yo so much pleasure?"

"Cause I hate him fo what he made of me." He spat through embittered lips.

"Yer not goin' ter stand der and tell me yo didn't enjoy dat job of yor'en."

"Only up to a pint."

"Yas sur! and dat pint bein' dat hard tool 'tween yo legs." He laughed and was joined by the others.

"Which only makes me a different kinda animal dan yo."

Nimbutu pondered on this answer. "All right, he's yourn. Kill'im!"

"Not yet."

"What yo mean, not yet?" Nimbutu demanded.

"I also want his woman and I wants him ter watch while de Nigger stud performs."

Nimbutu's eyes lit up with malice. The hallway was filled with obscene remarks and crude guffaws and smirking looks.

Apollo jerked Jamie to the stairs. Jamie struggled wildly against the ropes. "You black son of a bitch! Kill me now, because if I ever get loose I won't kill you—I will castrate you first before I chop you up into small pieces!" Jamie cried hoarsely.

"Git up the stairs—white man!" His lips curled with loathing as he jerked cruelly on the ropes again.

The rebels crowded the stairs, trying to reach the stairlanding first, but Lord Bartlett stood at the top thrusting with a vengeance.

Ruthlessly Jamie was shoved up the stairs. Hemmed in from all sides, the fetid odour of battle assailed his nostrils. From behind, Apollo's biting grasp tore at his shoulder. Though his hands were numb from the cords that bound him, he felt the sharp prick of a blade and suddenly he was free.

Apollo's mouth was close to the Captain's ear as he whispered, "Don't let nobody know, Cap'n. Git ter Missy soon as yo kin." Then with a heavy blow to his shoulder, Jamie was pushed and jostled forward.

He could see blood streaming from several wounds on his father's body. Flexing his hands and rubbing his wrists furtively to get the circulation to flow, he moved with the surging rabble. He wiped his warm, sticky palms on his thighs, dying his breeches crimson. Rivulets of blood seeped from beneath the coarse strands of rope which still encircled his wrists.

From behind him a piercing battle cry recognized up and down the Spanish Main sounded. The fearsome crew of the Falcon burst through the narrow passageway, filling the hallway. The two forces met each other slashing and cutting everything that moved. Jamie pushed his way to his father's side, just as the wounded, bleeding man collapsed. The Captain grabbed the fallen sword and set to work hacking and piercing with an inhuman passion.

He plunged into the melee, slicing left and right until his crimson-stained arm felt drained of feeling and still the carnage progressed. He was forced back toward the bedroom by sheer weight of numbers. The butchery continued as his men hewed their way up the staircase and down the hallway to his side, Billy's gory, smiling face leading the pack.

Jamie was backed into the room and found the women struggling with their attackers. Apollo was trying to defend Katy with a long bladed knife. Nimbutu was jabbing at him with a broken spear. There was a sudden thrust and the spear pierced the abdominal wall. Blood gushed forth from the surprised man before he crumbled to the floor.

With cutting blows Jamie tried to win his way to Katy's side. Nimbutu grabbed Apollo's long knife and seized Katy's wrist. The fair skin of the Master's wife was a pasty white. The alien colour held a hitherto unfamiliar fascination for the black rebel and the terror revealed in the odd green hue of her eyes stirred diverse sensations of anticipation. He had heard about the master's woman from some of the other field hands but he had never seen her before tonight. As his eyes quickly raked over her body he realized they had not exaggerated her bewitching beauty.

The iron grasp of the insurgent's hand upon her wrist pulled Katy's fleeing feet nearly out from under her. She finally gained her balance and turned fearfully to face her captor. Horrified, she watched the leer spread across his face into a cruel smile. With a cry of dismay, Katy jerked away from his grip when it loosened for an instant to draw her closer. Her flight was arrested once more when Nimbutu's heavy hand grabbed her shoulder; a rending of cloth and the top of her dress came loose in his grasp. He cast the covering aside and eagerly seized her again. His arm was wrapped around Katy's throat and in their struggle slipped upwards, covering her mouth and nose, cutting off the air. Desperately, Katy opened her mouth and bit down on his forearm and held on tightly. She nearly gagged when the sweet, sickening taste of blood flooded her mouth. Releasing her hold, she spat the gory fluid upon the floor. At her hesitation, Nimbutu clutched at the fiery white witch again. Jerking her to him, and using her half-naked body as a shield, he moved cautiously toward the door. His large hand cupped her creamy, white breast defiantly and stayed there.

At the contemptuous defiance, Jamie's momentum came

to an abrupt halt. His knees were still bent for balance, the sword tip drawing an invisible circle in the air. Never had Katy seen him so incensed, not even in Jamaica when he had fought and killed Bardagne. Then she had been terrified of him as he seemed like a crazed animal. Now he was as a rabid beast, with all reasoning diseased and lost. His black eyes glowed with a violent, feral madness. With teeth bared and upper lip curled tightly against his exposed fangs, he reminded her of an attacking wolf.

"Very nice," Nimbutu purred, fondling Katy's breast and smiling wickedly. "I'se neber touched a white woman befer. It ain't allowed, yo know."

Katy struggled against him and tried vainly to push his hand away. His grasp tightened, sending a pulsating pain through her breast. She screamed and strained against him.

"Hold still, er I'll kill yo," he commanded softly, jabbing the point of the blade into her side. "Don't do nothin' foolish, Cap'n. I'se gittin' outta here and Missy's comin' wid me."

"She is not going anywhere with you," Jamie flung at his enemy.

"I needs her as a hostage. Den she be free."

"Let her go now," Jamie spat. "Dead men do not need hostages."

"Back off, Cap'n, or yo ain't goin' ter have no mo soft, white flesh ter handle and play wid. Yo'll have ter come after yo black woman mo often." He laughed with an evil undertone. "Did yo enjoy dat black tail as much as de white one, Masta? We tried ter make sure yo did. Yo'll have ter teach Missy some of Carey's..."

"Shut your dirty mouth!" Jamie lunged at him.

Nimbutu turned Katy and the sword narrowly missed her as Jamie pulled back at the last minute. Katy slumped against her abductor in a near faint at the close brush with death.

"White men don't treat der women lak dey do ourn, do day, Masta?" he taunted. "White ears is mo gentle dan black ones."

Jamie could feel a demented violence building inside him. He was filled with frustration and guilt and knew that either he had to kill this offalinger or die himself. It was the only thing that would purge him of his own sins.

"I'se leavin', Cap'n, and I'se takin' yo woman wid me. If yo want her ter lib, yo better make sure no one tries ter stop me. De point of dis knife is terrible sharp, huh, Missy?" She gasped as the keen tip touched the soft underflesh of her breast, drawing blood. "We keeps'em sharp fer yo, Masta, to cut de tobacco stalks wid."

Jamie watched the black man move slowly away from him with Katy as an effective shield. Unconsciously he knew of the carnage and struggle going on around him. The back of his brain registered the moans, screams and curses that filled the room, but his undivided attention was on his wife and her tormentor. Jamie stalked the two, waiting his chance. Nimbutu moved slowly, one step at a time, never taking his eyes off the white man.

"Careful, Cap'n, don't try nothin' foolish," a wolfish grin creased his lips as he taunted the watchful husband.

Time seemed suspended. Sweat coursed down Jamie's face as he watched for even the slightest chance to attack. Nimbutu was in the process of taking a step and had moved just barely ahead of Katy, when suddenly there was an explosive discharge and immediately everyone's attention was drawn to the focal point—except the Captain's.

Katy paused and stifled back the cry within her, as she watched Lady Bartlett sink to the floor. At that second, Jamie thrust his sword over Katy's shoulder and into the right chest cavity of the insurgent. Startled, Katy moved slightly and as he withdrew the honed blade it bit into her shoulder; blood dripped down and across her breast in a long, thin line.

The wounded man inhaled a deep breath and looked at his adversary with unbelieving eyes. Jamie's hand darted at Katy and jerked her away from the doomed slave. She was propelled across the room, coming to rest against the wall.

Turning, she shrank against the panelled surface in horror. All around her the bloody slaughter continued. With knees trembling violently, she sunk slowly to the floor and in paralysed fascination watched the contending struggle between her husband and Nimbutu. She saw the knife drawn back and plunged forward. Jamie jumped away, the blade narrowly missing him. He swung his cutlass with both hands as if it was a broad sword and the keen blade swiftly decapitated the rebel.

In a near faint Katy was buffeted with waves of nausea sweeping over her at the needless and bloody butchery going on around her. The whole room seemed to be bathed in the crimson dye. Moans of the wounded and dying pounded against her ears and she covered them with her hands, burying her head against her skirt to shut out the horrifying scene.

It was only after his adversary ceased to quiver that Jamie turned his attention to the battle around him. The Falcon's crew had everything under control. The once triumphant and vicious slaves were now vanquished. They stood subdued, fearfully awaiting the master's pleasure.

"Take them out and lock them in the barn until I decide what to do with them. If anyone even twitches, kill him!" he told his men in clipped, barbed tones.

He saw his mother lying on the floor where she had fallen from the self-inflicted bullet. The yellow velvet gown was torn from neck to waist. Her long flaxen hair had loosened from its styish coiffure and spread out like a golden fan around her.

With heavy heart, he walked slowly across the room, his face contorted with grief. Kneeling beside the body, he lowered his head to his knee for a few moments. He lifted a pale golden tress to his lips, then with deliberate care, he arranged the torn garment and long, flowing hair to cover her exposed flesh from prying eyes. Tenderly crossing the now stilled aristocratic hands across her breast, he drew her eyelids across staring eyes, closing them. His teeth were

clamped tightly, concealing his grief. His eyes smarted as forbidden tears welled. He lowered his head to his knee momentarily until he was in control of his emotions, then bent to give a final kiss.

"Farewell, Mother, I hope wherever you are now that it is happier for you than this world has been," he whispered.

Rising quickly, he turned his attention to the battle-scarred room. Bodies were strewn around the room, hacked, mutilated and bloody. Two of his mother's servants were dead, brutally assaulted, their throats slit and their bodies cruelly cast aside.

Beulah, Rufus and Calab were huddled together in the corner where Apollo had fallen. Beulah had cradled his head against her enormous bosom, rocking and cooing to her unhearing, unseeing son. Great tears streamed down her heartbroken face. Calab kept patting his son's arm in a benumbed stupor.

Jamie's face hardened and his teeth ground together angrily. The door to the nursery was open and blocked by a dead rebel. He jumped across the body and entered the room. One of his crew was bending over a dazed Amanda with a bloody sword in his hand.

"Everything's all right in here, Captain."

Richard was lying in his cradle with a tear-stained face and racked with dry sobs, but otherwise well. Jamie returned to the bedroom and viewed the gory scene once more before his eyes fell on his wife. Katy was propped up against the wall. Billy was hunkered down beside the benumbed woman, patting her on the bared shoulder, murmuring becalming words to her.

The light fell on his weather-lined face which was now gentled and softened by—what? Jamie eyed him closely with a narrowed lower. He couldn't hear the words spoken, but he suddenly sensed the mood of them and suspicion stirred in his heart.

Billy felt someone watching them and glanced up before he could veil the expression in his eyes. Guilt reddened his

cheeks and ears. He rose to face the Captain.

"Katy's—uh—the mistress is kinda dazed, sir. I was but tryin' ter soothe her," he stammered.

"So I noticed." Jealously sharpening his tone, he moved between his wife and his rival, "You see to the men. I will take care of my wife."

"Aye, sir." He left quickly.

Early morning found Jamie facing the mutineers. He was disturbed to see that nearly all of the insurgents were slaves who had been under Amos Woodruff's control. The leaders had also picked up zealous volunteers at both farms they had visited on their rampage. He estimated over fifty rebels facing him.

Pacing his anger in front of them, he slapped a riding crop against his heavy boot, each swat echoing in the cool, crisp air. His glower touched every face and lingered for a scant second as if to memorize each transgressor. The silence increased until even the breathing was hushed. As Jamie eyed the black rabble again, most eyes met his with fear and apprehension and fell before his blazing glare. A few still faced him in open rebellion and met the glower with glares of their own defiance.

"Separate the ringleaders and put all of the guilty in chains," he told his men. "Put the leaders in shackles."

Standing off to one side under a huge oak, his booted foot rested against a fallen limb. The crop rose and fell against his leather encased leg as he watched the slaves point out their leaders.

When the task was finished, Jamie found five blacks named as the malefactors. They were quickly bound, wrists and ankles, in shackles. The chains were cut with a precise measurement so as not to impede mobility.

When the defiant five were returned from the blacksmith's shed, they faced the acrimonious master with the same proud demeanour as before. With dark and blazing eyes, the Captain stood before the insurgents. A lethal

malevolence filled the air with a heavy sense of evil and the slaves shuffled nervously under his glare. He continued to torment them silently for several minutes.

"Most of you have been with me for the ten years I have owned Fortune's Fancy. In that time I have fed and clothed you and seen to all your needs. As far as I know you had no reason for complaint, therefore no reason for rebellion. Much valuable property has been destroyed, including lives. Those lives also belonged to me and atonement must be made. Blood begets blood," the terse voice was carried on the crisp breeze to every ear.

"Before I pass judgement on any of you the dead will be buried and all signs of this mutiny will be cleared away." He turned to Billy, who was standing to one side. "Billy, get them on it. One crew working in the house and one on the grounds. Work them until they drop if you need to, but get it done!"

"Aye, sir!"

"Tell Rufus to saddle Diablo."

"Aye, sir." On his way to search for Rufus, he motioned for two of his men to join him, giving them instructions as they walked. When the two returned they gathered the slaves together and hustled them off toward the house. The sound of iron chains ringing in cadence filled the air.

Rufus brought the great black gelding to the provoked man; Jamie leaped into the saddle. Diablo, sensing the tension in the air and in the hands upon the reins, neighed shrilly and turned skittishly. With shortened reins and a firm hand, the horse quieted, Jamie paused only long enough to look back at the hurrying thralls. Then giving Diablo his boot, he headed toward Amos Woodruff's farm.

Riding into the lane leading to the farm, he saw that the buildings were still smoldering; ugly smoke rose into the brisk morning air masking the sky in a grey veil. The air carried the stench of burning wood and flesh. Urging Diablo forward, he rode into the yard at a full gallop. He reined the horse sharply, pulling back cruelly on the bridle. Diablo

protested loudly and pawed the air. Dismounting, Jamie scrutinized the devastation. Smoky vapours still rose indolently from the ashes which had once been the farmhouse. Some of the cabins had suffered the same fate. A furtive movement caught his eye and he whirled, hand reaching for his forgotten sword. He gripped the riding crop tighter. Rising from the midst of silent bodies, a wounded man staggered and fell to one knee, drawing a club held in his hand to the forefront. Through the dried blood encrusted on his face he recognized the white man.

"Cap'n!" he exclaimed. A wide smile creased his face and half-running and half-stumbling he reached the Captain's side.

"Adam, I thought you were dead." Jamie extended his hand and the big man grasped it firmly.

"No sur, but ma haid sure wished it wuz dis marnin' when I woke up." He turned his head and the captain saw a large knot and a gash encrusted with dried blood and dirt.

Reluctantly they turned to face the gruesome scene. Amos Woodruff and his wife lay near the place which had once been their home. Jamie closed his eyes against the needless butchery which confronted him. He had never made it his business to learn the name of his overseer's wife because of her timidity when around him. Now that frail, thin nameless woman lay before him brutally murdered. The unknown assailant had cruelly assaulted her and then in a crazed frenzy, heretofore unequaled to the pirate captain's eyes, the blackguard had hacked at her face and body with a keen-bladed knife. Through the sodden crimson mass congealed throughout the grey hair, Jamie could see that the skull had been split open. The fragile corpse lay twisted upon the ground, now soggy and scarlet. His body sagged in sudden exhaustion, he felt bone-weary of the carnage engulfing him. With dread he turned to the husband.

Even though Jamie was well acquainted with blood and gore from his years in the Brotherhood, he was unprepared for the inhuman ferocity which surrounded him. His

stomach heaved at the sight of his overseer. Each member of his body had been hacked asunder with maniacal blows until the body lay in parts, scattered upon the gory earth. The dried rubrical flow rivaled the red hue of the Mother Earth it drenched.

The two men looked at one another with heartsick eyes and turned away from the most vicious of sights, vomiting until they were racked with dry heaves. Everywhere they looked the same barbaric scene met their despondent eyes.

"Why vent their savagery on their own people?" Jamie asked in a low, weary voice. "There is more butchery here than at the house."

"De anger jist built up and built up 'til it jist had ter explode. Maybe by de time dey reached de big house it was near used up. Besides, dey wuz afeared of yo."

A sardonic laugh escaped his lips. "Not too afraid to use the whip on me," Jamie reminded him tersely.

"But dat happened at de furst, when de bloodlust wuz in 'em. Even savages kin only stand so much blood. Most of ma people wuz here fer many years and wuz trained ter be obedient," he reminded his master.

Jamie continued to survey the scene, shaking his head in disbelief. When at last his soul rebelled against the fulsome chaos, he turned his attention to his other duties.

"Are there any horses left?"

"Yas sir."

"Find yourself one, so we can inspect the other farms and see how much damage they have suffered."

It took the rest of the afternoon to investigate the ravaged plantation. They discovered the violence had begun at Wolf Creek, behind his father's farm, and had advanced only to the Woodruff acreage, these two farms being the only ones to suffer the decimating destruction.

"Thank God, they did not get to the wharves. The Falcon made port last night just in time to help put the mutiny down. She can load the tobacco after we get this mess cleaned up, and get back to Jamaica with her second load."

As they rode back to the main house, Jamie related the mutinous events to Adam, informing him of his family's safety and his brother's death.

"I'se glad he proved hisself befo he died. Least, Mammy kin believe he weren't one of 'em. If'en he han't been at Carey's place he wouldna been wid dem anyways."

"Where is Carey? I didn't see her—back there," Jamie remarked tersely.

"She's layin' back dere at Mr. Amos'. I saw'er." Adam choked back the sob that rose in his throat, as Carey's mutilated body flashed before him.

"Dead?"

Adam nodded, too filled with emotion to speak. Since the day the Captain had forced him to bed Carey, Adam had been secretly visiting the beautiful woman and had become quite fond of her. Not knowing for a certainty whether the baby she carried was the master's or his own had begun to gnaw on him and had caused many arguments between the two, for Carey enjoyed taunting him with the uncertainty. Now that she was dead, the argument would be put to rest with her.

The two men rode in silence, each wrapped in his own remembrances of the enchanting slave girl they knew as Carey.

Explosive memories of the bewitching Carey burst guiltily upon Jamie's weary mind. He had no desire to remember those long, forbidden hours spent in the soft arms of that alluring wench. He struggled in vain to overcome them, but the effort was wasted. The thorn from the prickly plant of guilty conscience had been planted deeply in his breast and now jabbed at him with a cruel barb. And as if to distress him further, Katy's innocent face crowded into his smarting conscience, adding a barb of its own. Uttering a vile oath, he rode ahead of Adam, not wishing to expose his weakness to an inferior.

The memory of satiny-smooth mahogany skin writhing beneath his hands provoked other culpable thoughts: the

way her body glowed a warm burnt umber in the candlelight; the nacreous luster gleaming behind teasing, sensuous lips; the tormenting ecstasy of her mouth and hands upon him, nipping and kneading; biting and rubbing, sucking and stroking, tore through his gut like a ripping blade. The wild abandon of the untamed wench had intrigued him from the beginning and the day of the disastrous storm which had destroyed nearly half of the cotton crop, followed by Katy's rejection of him, had driven him into her captivating arms.

Though the breach of that indiscretion had been bridged, it still pricked at him. He had tried to ignore the urging call of virility in the final weeks of Katy's confinement, but somehow or other when the urgency was upon him Carey was there—working beside him in the fields; slaking his thirst in the glaring hot sun with a dipper of cool water from the well and once, bathing in the pool of the secluded glen he had found long ago and thought unknown to anyone other than himself, where he often went for a swim. Laughingly, she had declared she had cast a spell on him which would bring him to her on her concentrated command. And damned if he hadn't begun to believe it, for many were the times his feet desired to take him to her, and few were the times his dominant will denied the sensual urgings.

Then the baby had arrived and soon all was as before with his wife. And he had pushed Carey back into a dark corner of his mind like a once enjoyed but now forgotten toy.

Now, try as he might, he was unable to remember clearly what had turned his foot upon Carey's path the last time. With clarity he could recall the volatile argument with Katy over his suspicions concerning his sire and the overwhelming feeling of rejection gutting him like a blunt blade. His first thought had been to flee to the willing wench, and Diablo's racing gait had delivered him to Amos's farm, but a light in the window of Tobias' cabin and the sound of several masculine voices had stirred his suspicions, detouring him in that direction. Faced with an early rising and a hard day's labour, several slaves gathered together at that time of night

usually indicated mischief in the making. He had entered without announcing his presence, hoping to catch them in a conspiring act. Tobias and five or six other field hands were sitting around a long table drinking and talking. At his entrance, the conversation had abruptly ceased as if they had been caught unaware. After a few stumbling explanations (one to which he could relate, because the man complained about his wife kicking him out of the house for the night), Jamie was urged to join them in a drink or two. Although he was quite aware of the effects that nigger hooch had upon him, he succumbed to the urging, for God only knew he needed a drink or two to collect his wits about him. One drink had led to two, and two had led to anybody's guess. From that time on anything that he remembered at all, until waking up in a tub of frigid water in his own bedroom, came in vague misty flashes — Except the few times the alcohol had worn off and Carey had displayed her talent for unusual carnal knowledge. Then all desire to escape fled and his weakened defenses collapsed and he yielded to the favours pressed upon him. Not since the hours spent in Mistress Kettle's House of Paradise had he indulged in the pleasure of enjoying those sins frowned upon by London's sombre, straight-laced Puritans and the self-righteous Catholics, who delighted in denying everyone else any moments of joy.

Diablo, he found out later, had been returned to his stall to confuse those at home as to his direction and mode of travel. When he had come face to face, as a captive, with Tobias again the man had cast off the servile character of the fawning, agreeable slave and had once more assumed his proper name, Nimbutu, and his proper station, as a chief to his people. With an arrogance born to him, the rebel leader had bragged of his intentions regarding Fortune's Fancy, the slaves who would not join their ranks, the white women... and Amos Woodruff. In very explicit language, to fully excite his bloodthirsty followers, he had described the expected plans for the white women and especially Amos Woodruff. Foolishly, Jamie recalled, he had broken away

from his captors and had attacked Nimbutu. Adam had followed his desperate attempt and he had seen the big man crumble before the onslaught. He could still remember the exhilaration which had soared through him as his hands closed around the mutinous throat, but it had been short-lived. A multitude of fists had beaten him to the ground, only to be superseded by the crushing blows of angry feet.

He had unwillingly resigned himself to an ignominious death until, on the edge of unconsciousness, he had been jerked to his feet. Strong hands had held him up when rebellious legs had refused to do so. The drench of icy water had awakened him and Nimbutu's brutal grasp of a handful of hair had quickly gotten his undivided attention. The infuriated leader had derided him with degrading names and vile oaths and a few fetish curses. It was then his shirt had been stripped from him and willing hands had bound him to the pillory and once more he had felt the biting caress of the whip. Discovering anew that it made no difference who was on the other end, the caress still brought the embrace of exquisite pain. When he had awakened he found he was lying on the cold, dewy carpet of grass outside the dark, bolted house he called home. The icy wetness against his back soothed the burning, acrimonious pangs ripping across his back and chest. Two guards had watched over him while the rabble had waited for a ram to be found with which to break the door down. When the great door had splintered and crashed open, the triumphant cry of the mob had nearly deafened him. Once inside the house, his anxious eyes had frantically searched for a final look at his wife . . .

A hand on his shoulder rudely alerted him to the present. Startled at first, he had lifted a tightly clenched fist to ward off an expected blow. Surprised by the sudden movement, Adam ducked beneath the thrown fist.

With a look of chagrin, the Captain apologized. "My mind was dwelling elsewhere."

Adam nodded, accepting the explanation. Nevertheless he still remained several feet away for safety's sake. He

pointed ahead, "We're almost done, Cap'n," he mumbled. Jamie looked in the direction indicated, then nodded.

Billy had everyone gathered together, giving instructions, when Jamie and Adam rode in. The Captain dismounted and gave the reins to Rufus, who had come running when he heard the horses trotting up the lane.

"Rub him down good, then feed and water him," he told the boy brusquely. Turning to Billy, the abrupt manner remained. "I want those vandals sent to Amos's next. Send someone else in your place. We need to have an accounting." Jamie's manner was cold and distant to his friend.

"Aye, sir, I kin send my first mate, Mr. Cox."

"John Cox?"

"Aye, sir."

"That session with the cat must have taught him something."

"Aye, sir. It don't take many caresses of the likes of it ter educate a man quickly."

"It might do you well to remember that," Jamie told him curtly as they eyed each other. "Send for Mr. Cox, I will meet with the two of you in the library."

The three men sat in the silent room in front of a cheerful, blazing fire, yet the mood was tense. Jamie stood in front of the fire with his arm resting on the mantle. He scrutinized them with narrowed eyes. Moving to the liquor cabinet and pouring a generous amount of brandy, he turned a threatening gaze on them.

"Mr. Cox, you will take a dozen or so of the rebels to Mr. Amos's farm and bury the dead, then clean up the carnage there." He took a long draught before continuing. His voice thickened with anger as he began to pace before them. "Most of them will have tō be buried in a sack. My God, I have never seen such butchery, not even when we sacked Panama. I thought the Brotherhood was as barbaric as human capacity would allow until last night . . . Even the thought of the slaughter over there sickens me." He took another drink before continuing.

"Send your second mate—Gerrard, isn't it?" He looked at Billy, who nodded. "Start him and the crew helping the slaves to clean up and bury the dead. I want the niggers to do the actual burying, except for Amos and his wife. I want them to get a gut-full of the havoc in the light of day to carry with them for as long as they live!" he snarled. "Fetch coffins from Cato for Amos and his wife. I want words said over them and I want them laid to rest in the orchard. Whatever the husband was—whatever harm he caused, his wife was a good woman and a Christian. A husband, whether he be good or evil, should lie beside his wife." He paused, thinking of the small, timid woman, wondering why he could not remember her face.

"The rest of them—pile them in a common grave." His voice cracked like a whip in the stilled room.

"Most of them were Christian too..."

"A common grave, Mister! No words, no compassion, no respite!"

"Cap'n, they be the victims too!" Billy protested.

"Did you hear my orders, sir!" he hissed, "No absolution—not in this world anyway!" His fist hit the cabinet soundly. Bottles and glasses rattled and broke.

The two men looked at each other with dismay.

"Jump to it, Mister!"

"Aye, sir."

Jamie grabbed Billy by the arm as he passed and spun him around to face him. "You and I are not through," he told him tersely.

Billy looked at his Captain and master with a deceptive calmness. "No," he sighed, "I suppose not, sir." He hesitated. "With all due respects, sir, I have never violated your confidence in me."

"Not until my wife!"

"She is a beautiful woman and I be a mere man. I canna deny I love her. But I woulda kept that locked in my heart and wouldna let ye know of it, except last night... What kin I say, sir? I was frightened fer her and she be so afraid that I

jist couldna keep it in my heart any longer."

Billy watched Jamie closely. An inner struggle was written in his partially veiled eyes.

Jamie fought against the defense offered by mind and heart in Billy's behalf. Neither had to remind him that Billy had been closer to him than a father, nor that he had taken care of him, giving him aid or advice when needed and companionship when sought. He knew Billy had offered willingly and trustingly all that he owned—including his life—to him. His thoughts rang loudly in his mind and his memory was pierced with guilt as he recalled how many times they had battled back to back and he had been triumphant because of the strong, trusting arm of his friend. He clamped his jaw tightly as guilt turned to anger.

"She's never been untrue to ye, sir. Nor have I. Why else did I ask leave ter go back to the sea, even though I am bound ter ye by paper and honour? I wouldna dishonoured ye or the Mistress. Rather would I lose my life." He straightened dejected shoulders and looked into the Captain's eyes. "If there had ever been a chance fer me, sir, I'd'a taken it, no matter the cost. But from the beginning, we o' the crew knew the outcome of the battle. Ye've always been Katy's choice." At Billy's inference Jamie bristled, having always supposed he had held the upper hand and the choice was his.

Billy laughed at the expression on the disgruntled face, "Aye, Cap'n, ye fell into the same trap men have become ensnared in from the beginning. Have ye not learned yet, tis not the man who chooses? In a battle with the Spanish I'll back ye no matter where it be fought nor the odds, but on the battlefield o' love, sir, me money will be on the damsels everytime," he chuckled.

Emotions swept over Jamie which he couldn't sort out and angrily he turned his back on Billy. At that moment Beulah broke into the room.

"Cap'n, his Lordship is callin' fer yo."

Jamie almost welcomed the intrusion. "What about him?" he demanded harshly.

"I think he's dyin', sir."

Jamie hesitated, fists clenched at his side. "Attend me," he told Billy and they raced to the steps, taking them two at a time.

On reaching the closed door where his father lay, Jamie's feet faltered. He opened the door slowly. His father lay in bed with closed eyes. His face looked pinched and sallow from pain and loss of blood. His skin had a look of old parchment, wrinkled and yellow. His breathing was short and shallow. The younger man stood by the bedside and watched the older image of himself struggle for life.

"My Lord," he whispered uncertainly.

His father's eyes opened slowly and an amused smile darted across the pale lips and swiftly disappeared. "Even in death, is it to be 'My Lord'?" He forced the words huskily. "Is the name 'father' so vile as to be unable to pass your lips?"

"Beulah said that you wished to see me," Jamie returned curtly, ignoring the unspoken plea.

"I want to make amends with you." Each word was an effort, still Jamie was unrelenting. "Deathbed repentance, as it were." His eyes closed momentarily as he rested.

Jamie rubbed his perspiring palms against his thighs. He felt his throat constricting, hurting. He felt all the barriers that he had erected long ago shaking and he tried to steel himself against the undercurrent passions tearing at his insides.

All the embittered words spoken by his grandfather against this man assaulted his heart and brain; this lecher who sired him in lust and abandoned him until it suited his own purposes to claim him as son. He recalled the unending slurs and insults he had encountered because of the brand of bastard placed upon him by this man.

The face of his mother rose before him as he remembered the years he had been called upon to play a vile and obscene role to placate his mother's insanity. Once again he felt the animosity bubble inside his gut. He opened his mouth to hurl the resentment of the years of cavalier neglect into the dying

old man's face. Then he remembered the happiness and joy and peace she had enjoyed these past few months because her husband had been by her side once more.

He was appalled to find his heart softening toward this lustful and selfish man he had taught himself to loath. Yet was the son any different from the father, he wondered. Were they alike in more than merely superficial appearance? Did he hate his father because he had been taught to do so or simply because he saw his own hidden failings brought to light? His father sought to hide his weaknesses behind an amused scornful smile, caustic words and a bored attitude, while his were walled up behind a pretentious mask of passions.

"Can you forgive an erring father?" the dying man whispered. "Many times I have tried to make reparations but you thrust them aside. Surely, my father taught you well."

Jamie leaned forward to catch the whispered words. "I always felt you were my only true son, for you were conceived in love. I never claimed to be a strong man, just a vain one." He closed his eyes and rested for a moment. "When I convinced your mother to try to pass you off as Phillip's son I was young and afraid of losing the inheritance. Money was my true passion then, until I found out what I had thrown away. I loved your mother dearly—in my own way. She has always known that. But I could never touch you. My father made sure of that. He filled you so full of his hatred of me, no one could reach you."

He paused once more to rest, "But you were a true son. It horrified your mother when you took to piracy." He laughed until it turned into a racking cough. Jamie reached toward him, but was waved weakly away.

"But I was proud of you," he continued after a few short moments of rest, "even when you flaunted your defiance by flying your version of the Bartlett banner along the Spanish Main. You did the things society forbade me to do and said be damned with the world. We would have made a team, son. But we let tradition and personal hatred and mistrust rip us

asunder. For that weakness in both of us, I am sorry. Can we reconcile our differences before it is too late?"

Jamie took his father's flaccid hand in his and felt his throat tighten again. "Yes, father." His voice broke.

"Son—" The smile ceased as a spasm of coughing shook him; then he lay quietly with his eyes closed. Jamie thought he was resting again. He looked at Billy, then back to his father again. The chest didn't seem to be moving and the laboured breathing had ceased. Jamie put his hand on the broad chest and listened.

He looked at Billy with surprise. "He's dead."

"Aye, sir."

"He's dead." He repeated slowly as if he couldn't believe it and stood looking at his father for a long while then sighed. "Now doesn't that beat all? The son of a bitch did it to me again. He has won the final round also."

"Aye, that he has, sir."

They looked at each other in mild surprise, then a grin crossed each of their faces and Jamie chuckled and shook his head as if sharing a private joke, one his father would have thoroughly enjoyed, as he covered Lord Thomas Bartlett's face.

Chapter 21

The next few days were spent burying the dead and cleaning up the vast destruction at the plantation. Lord Bartlett's manor and slave quarters had been gutted by fire. Several buildings had had to be razed. The same held true at Amos Woodruff's farm. On closer scrutiny Jamie found that even the barnyard animals had not escaped the fury of the rebels. Chickens had been used in their juju rites. Some of the valuable horses were found with their throats cut. The cattle had been mutilated, the bulls castrated and the heifers' udders cruelly slit.

Jamie's anger over the senseless butchery was uncontained. The blacks cringed whenever he turned his unrelenting eyes on them. Even the defiant ones were growing edgy and murmured uneasily amongst themselves.

The day of reckoning finally arrived. Jamie commanded everyone to view it. Even Katy was not excused from the judgment and penalty.

The Negroes were gathered in a semicircle with the rebels

surrounded by the half ring of apprehensive blacks. Jamie stood at a makeshift judgment bar, constructed of a heavy plank across two empty hogsheads. The pirate crew stood behind him, heavily armed. Katy sat at his side holding the restless baby.

Jamie's enmity seemed to touch everyone personally as his grim ebony eyes sought out each individual. Even Katy felt a shudder jolt through her as his eyes passed her by.

Still Jamie stood watching them silently. Once more, Katy felt, he looked the part that he preferred above all others, that of the buccaneer. His dark hair was caught at the nape of his neck, and he wore the wide sleeved shirt partially open to the waist, which revealed most of his tanned muscular chest. His folded arms were clenched across his midsection. Thigh-high boots encased his long legs, hiding most of the closely molded breeches he wore, and were spread apart as if to keep his balance on a rolling deck. A long, keenly honed Toledo sword hung from his slim hip in a heavily ornamented leather baldric. Around his neck swung a vicious black whip. His face was enveloped in the horrid mask Katy so despised.

A cool, crisp breeze stirred the nearly bare branches, stripping off the few remaining leaves. They fluttered silently and gracefully to the dank, red earth.

"Five days ago a mutiny took place here and many people were brutally murdered . . ." He let his words dwindle away and watched those in front of him squirm beneath his accusing glower. "The rebellion was planned and instituted by those you see before you in shackles and carried out by those standing with them." His deep voice carried clearly to all present. None could mistake the remorseless tone that rang in the stillness. Those standing near the rebels unconsciously took a backward step.

He continued in his angry, clipped voice. "Much valuable property was destroyed wantonly, but worse than all this, discipline was destroyed and hands were laid upon those in authority!" His voice rang in deepening anger. "White

women were abused! . . . and murder committed!" He further tormented the guilty by silence. "All infractions of the law demand but one penalty—death!"

The rebels moved uneasily. Some fell to their knees, tears streaming down their faces, their hands reaching out for mercy. Katy felt her heart would break for those poor wretched people. She felt she must intercede and do what she could to aid them. Moving slightly in the chair, she turned toward her husband, who eyed her coldly.

"Not a word out of you, madam!" he commanded. Then turned his attention forward again. "There are five of you brigands in chains. You will pay the full price."

He gave a motion to those behind him. Billy and Mr. Cox stepped forward with ropes and moved to the nearby tree and threw the thick cordage over two of the sturdy lower branches. Two horses were brought forward.

"Those of you in shackles will hang, the rest of you will receive twenty five lashes and you will have fetters put upon your ankles and will wear them to the grave!" His voice cracked like the whip he wore around his neck. "You will also wear a brand in the middle of your forehead so all will know you for what you are—Rebel! Get on with it, Billy."

The chains were removed from the five felons and their hands tied behind their backs and two of them were roughly pushed toward the horses by some of Billy's crew. They had to lift them bodily into the saddles. Their eyes dilated and rolled in exquisite fear as they stared at the nooses swinging to and fro in the breeze. Then the nooses were pulled around their necks. Rough hands held them on the nervous horses.

Clutching the baby tightly to her breast until he cried, Katy rose to go to the house.

"Sit down, Katy! No one leaves!"

"Jamie, I-I- can't stand this . . ."

"No one leaves!"

Just then a loud slap was heard and the horses leaped forward and the two men dangled from their ropes, twisting and turning in the silent air. One of them made terrible

rasping and gurgling sounds in his throat. As he turned, Katy could see his face. The soft brown eyes had rolled back into his head, leaving only the whites visible, his tongue jutting forth and lolled from his mouth. One of the bucanears grabbed hold of the slave's legs and pulled, hauling his weight off the ground. Shortly the sound ceased.

Katy felt her eyes roll up and a loud buzzing sounded in her head, then blessed darkness enveloped her. Amanda broke from the circle and started toward her mistress.

"Go back to your place, Amanda!" Jamie barked.

"But Missy..."

The baby began to cry loudly. Jamie turned to seek his disturbance. "She's only fainted. Get my son and return to where you belong."

When Katy awoke she was in her own bed. Her head ached with a dull thud and it took several seconds for her to recall the source of her anxiety.

She could hear a monotonous slap-slap as she slid from the bed. Her head swam, causing her to sit down heavily on the side of the bed until it righted itself; she made her way slowly to the window, turning away quickly after taking a brief glance. Tears welled in her eyes and fell unmindfully. She covered her ears trying to block out the horrible sound. One of the Negroes was tied to the whipping post receiving his promised twenty-five lashes. Jamie stood by watching.

"He's probably counting each stripe as it is laid upon the poor wretch's back," she told herself scornfully.

Resentment surged through her for the merciless man she called husband. She knew that he would have no peace until the wrongs committed against him were paid to the full measure.

With heartfelt compassion, Katy crept back to bed and tried to shut out the cruel din of the scourgings. The hours slipped away slowly and still the horrible ordeal continued until the carking building inside her threatened release. Her throat ached from holding the frustrations back. If only she

could sleep, she wailed silently, or if only there was someplace she could flee, to escape this harsh, brutal land. The spirit of the barbaric country seemed to reach out and touch everyone who dwelt here with its savage touch. She lay staring at the high ceiling, her aching head muffled in the feather pillow, praying that the hideous sounds would cease, but the monstrous slap of the whip sounded louder to her aching ears and the wailing cries of the punished beat upon her heart. Gradually consciousness ebbed and gratefully she slept.

A slight rap sounded at the door. "Come in," Katy invited.

Amanda opened the door and padded softly to her side. "De master say ter come ter dinner."

"Tell the master that I am not hungry," she retorted.

"Missy, he says fer me ter tell yo ter come downstairs, if you gave a excuse not ter jine him."

Katy closed her eyes and sighed. Even from a distance she could feel the strength of greater will overpowering her, leaving her drained and exhausted.

"Missy, the Cap'n said ter hurry," Amanda whispered.

A picture flashed through her mind of the tall man looking down upon the petite Amanda, demanding the presence of his disobedient wife. "Yes, of course, please help me dress." She swung her feet to the floor with effort. Each movement seemed to demand a concentrated endeavour.

Amanda brought a dress over to her mistress. Katy saw it was one of the green velvet ones Jamie had bought her on Jamaica. Remembering the happier times she had worn the gown, Katy shook her head.

"No, not that one. I do not feel like wearing anything as cheerful as that tonight." She went to the closet, taking down a pearl grey one with a touch of white lace at the throat and wrists offsetting the drabness of the sombre gown. "This one will do."

Amanda arranged her hair loosely, as Katy instructed,

securing it at the crown with a black velvet ribbon. With indifferent eyes, Katy sat before her mirror viewing her reflection, barely noting the large dark circles under her eyes, the pinched and pale skin and the bluish cast of her lips.

Descending the long staircase, the despondent young woman could hear male voices coming from the library. Pausing just inside the door, she found her husband leaning against the mantel. Billy and Mr. Cox sat with their backs to her on the plush divan.

"Ah, it seems that we are to be blessed with feminine companionship tonight after all," Jamie greeted her bitingly.

The two crewmen came to their feet at his first words, turning to her. The Captain's resentful glare rested upon his bondsman, watching for the smallest hint of attention toward his wife. Billy bowed slightly toward Katy, his face empty of any expression that would reveal his feeling for the beautiful colleen. Mr. Cox nodded a silent greeting.

"Did I have a choice, m'Lord?"

Jamie frowned darkly at the old barb. "It would seem that your attire matches your mood, madam." He retorted tartly.

"I had no idea there would be gaiety in this house tonight, M'Lord, since there has been so much sorrow these past few days. Forgive me for my oversight," Katy told him coldly.

His eyes narrowed at her jeer, "Are you questioning my rights in the matter of punishing those who have violated my law?" he demanded.

"Nay, Lord, is there one among us who would dare such a dastardly crime?" she taunted.

Jamie's hands were clenched as he viewed Katy and Billy, wondering from whence came the boldness of the twit. Whirling, with an oath, he faced the blazing fire. Raising a tightly clenched fist, he brought it down harshly upon the mantel, and with a sweep of his large hand he knocked the loudly beating, gold trimmed, porcelain clock and one of the matching cherubim to the floor before turning to the offenders with eyes flashing in anger.

"You overtax my patience with your barbed tongue,

woman. Is it because of the love-smitten swain before you that you gather greater courage than is usually yours to possess? If so, I would suggest that you take care, for his sword is no match for mine. Do you seek his life on your conscience, madam?"

With brow wrinkled in puzzlement, Katy studied her angry husband, "I know not what you attempt to suggest, Jamie. If I am bolder than before, it is because of the horror I have seen these last few days and because as your wife I feel I have rights of my own. Not the least of these is the right of respect and trust, not only from those considered by some to be beneath me, but by you also, my husband," she answered with a tremor in a voice striving to be firm.

Jamie looked at the petite beauty uttering the inane foolishness of "the rights of a wife" incredulously. From deep inside came the rumble of laughter and he threw back his head, releasing the disdainful roar.

"By the saints, woman, I think the distressing days past have addled your wits." He crossed the room as he spoke, stopping in front of her. "Your wifely rights are those which I allow you," his voice lowered harshly. "... and none other!"

Grasping Katy by the arm, he turned to his discomfited guests, "Shall we dine?"

As the couple passed through the portal leading out of the library the captain was heard to utter scornfully with a snort, "Wifely rights!"

All through the meal Katy picked at her food. The conversation was sparse and restrained. With furtive glances Katy saw that Jamie eyed Billy and her with a jaundiced glare. Katy was at a loss as to his anger against Billy. If only she could find a way to speak to Billy and try to unwind this tangle she felt closing around her. She could feel her husband's dark eyes on her once more. Keeping her own focused on her plate, she found little peace pushing the vegetables from here to there while avoiding his angry leer. Katy sensed the restless uneasiness in the men sitting to her right and left. She cast a surreptitious look at Billy, but he

kept his eyes downward, raising them only to answer a question directed at him. With determined effort he ignored Katy's pleading eyes for explanation of her husband's crude behaviour, knowing that the Captain would be on the alert for any meetings between the two. He wished that he could explain to her the Captain's sudden jealousy of him, but realized the danger to the both of them if they should be discovered together, no matter how innocent that meeting might be.

Jamie kept the conversation limping along with his plans for the Falcon. Billy or his mate commented only when necessary. The decanter of brandy clinked against the Captain's goblet time and again as he sought solace in his cup. Soon the silence was broken only by the crackling and snapping wood as it was consumed in the fiery, devouring flames of the hearth.

Katy raised her eyes to find her husband's piercing gaze upon her. He lifted a sardonic brow contemplating her unspoken request. A mocking smile touched his lips as he viewed her.

"May I please be excused . . . my head . . ."

"Of course, my sweet. It has been a trying day for you." He started to rise, but Billy jumped up and helped with her chair.

"Thank you, Billy." She nodded to the three standing men and quickly left the room. Desiring the comfort and tranquillity normally found in her room, she hurried across the hallway and up the stairs, running the rest of the way down the corridor. Once inside, she leaned against the door for a few moments, giving a deep sigh of relief. Crossing to the window, she found a seat there and looked woefully out at the dismal eventide. The moon seemed to withhold its brightness and cast but a faint glow to the ground below. She tucked her legs under her and leaned her head against the cold pane. The autumn trees rustled in the light wind. Soon all the leaves would be gone, swept away by the quiet breezes.

"If only the memories of these last few days could vanish as easily," she murmured.

From below masculine voices reached her ears. Then Billy and Mr. Cox appeared in the pale light of the moon, walking toward the stables. Her heart leaped into her throat and found abode there as she listened for Jamie's familiar step.

The sound of horses walking toward the house turned her attention below again. Billy and Mr. Cox were astride their mounts leading Diablo. Then the indistinct rumble of male voices conversing rose in the silent night; after a few minutes Billy and his first mate rode west toward Hawk's Lair and Jamie rode south toward the wharf and the Falcon.

Katy watched the dark garbed horseman until the night swallowed him and the sound of pounding hooves were no more. Then she lowered her head to her knees, trying to sort out the emotions racing through her. A feeling of rejection overwhelmed her with self-pity. She felt not only rejected, but sadly neglected as well, and wished there was a way to call Jamie back to her side. Yet it seemed as if everytime they were together of late angry words rose between them, creating a chasm too great to be bridged. With aching heart she could at last vent her greatest fear, Jamie no longer loved her! She raised her head and stared out of the window with haunted eyes and let the incomprehensible message beat against her heart, Jamie no longer loves me! Soon her whole body vibrated with the damnable words.

"No!" she cried jumping to her feet. "No, it can't be true! I won't let it be true! Somehow . . . someway . . . I'll make him love me again."

The following day found Katy moping about the house, puttering here and there in search of something to keep mind and hands busy. There was so much to be done to wipe out the memories of those terrifying hours which still haunted everyone. Katy's heart ached for Beulah, for that poor soul suffered keen distress for her son and her eyes showed the effects of many tear-filled hours. Katy longed to comfort her,

but was shy about approaching her in her grief.

The house was slowly being restored to its original beauty. The broken furniture had been taken to Cato's shop for repairs. Carpets had been cleaned of the grime and gore. Those stubborn stains which refused to disappear had been covered by throw rugs and would be replaced by new carpeting on the Falcon's return trip.

Katy's bedchamber down the hall was now being resanded and revarnished to remove the bloody stains which refused to wash away. Katy would spend the nights to come in a strange room and a strange bed at the other end of the corridor—alone. She turned to contemplate the unfamiliar four poster. She had no desire to sleep upon the strange bedstead without the warm, muscular maleness beside her. Her inner heart turned to her embittered husband. All day she had fought with her conscience.

Had she been too hard on him? she asked herself. After all, he had lost his parents and nearly everything he had fought for all these years. Did she really understand the ordeal he was going through?

After contending with her inner self all morning, she made up her mind to go to him and ask his forgiveness and try to offer whatever comfort she could. But what if he should turn her away? Katy hesitated at the terrible thought. No, she wouldn't let that happen. She would go to him on her knees if need be.

Once the decision was made, Katy called Amanda and Beulah and gave them instructions about things to be done until she returned, sensing that once Beulah had an arduous task to occupy time and mind her grief would not lie so heavily on her heart. She changed quickly into her riding habit and waited impatiently for the mare to be brought to her. Once mounted, the miles separating her from Jamie disappeared beneath the flying hooves of the mare. In her haste she had forgotten to bind her hair and it now flew behind her like a blazing banner.

The spectacular view of the plantation dropped behind her and soon she could see the wharf area. The Falcon's empty masts stabbed at the grey, dreary sky forlornly. The crew worked slowly at the dock, loading the heavy barrels of tobacco into the dark hold of the ship. The block and tackle groaned and creaked loudly as it protested its use. Male voices rose to her ear, but she listened for only one. Her eyes searched each face in vain.

She rode up slowly and one of the crew helped her dismount and took the reins from her. A light smile of gratitude touched her lips, and disappeared as she moved away, hesitatingly now.

Her heart was beating loudly and her hands felt icy. She had had these same feelings before when she had approached another tall ship, she thought.

Some of the crew members watched as she came up the gangplank. Faltering, she looked around the ship. Everywhere there was activity, as if they would soon be leaving. The ship's tackle lay in neat piles. Everything looked scrubbed and clean. All that she observed showed the hand of a well-trained captain and crew. Her eyes failed to find the one she sought and she started to step down onto the deck.

Billy had seen her riding in and had moved to the rail to watch her approach the ship. He felt the familiar tightening around his heart that had driven him from his Captain's side to the deck of the Falcon. Beauty radiated from her, her tousled hair caught the weak rays of the sun and outshined them, her slanting eyes matched the sea-green depths of the bay, her skin glowed with the rosy warmth of the stimulating ride from the plantation manor. His throat went dry and his heart felt as if it might break from the mere sight of her. She appeared lovelier than ever to eyes that were suddenly misty. Crossing the gangplank she searched each face and as she did so Billy moved closer, watching her unobserved for a few moments longer. He put out his hand to her as she started to step down.

"How are you, Katy?" he asked softly.

She searched his face for the deeper meaning in his words. "I am fine now, Billy." Her emerald eyes softened as they met his grey ones.

He seemed to give himself an inward shake. "The Capt'n's below. Be ye needin' some help?"

"No, thank you. I will find him."

Her hand was cold as he held it to help her down, but when he released it his flesh felt hot where she had touched. He watched her cross the deck. A new aura surrounded her. She was at last a woman. The Captain's woman. Billy tucked the Katy he loved in the recesses of his heart and turned away from the Katy who had emerged, for she would belong to no man, save one.

Her hair blazed as she descended. The companionway was narrow and dark and the door at the rear was closed and foreboding. She tugged at her bottom lip with her teeth as she approached the cabin. Suddenly she felt that she should turn and run and let him come to her when he found the need within him. But with firm determination she vetoed the thought, reminding herself sternly that she was here to regain her husband and would not leave until that purpose was fulfilled. She laid her hand on the latch and taking a deep breath pushed the door open.

"Don't you know to knock, damn it!" The angry words cut the air.

He stood as once before, dressed in the familiar tight-fitting breeches and naked to the waist. A magnificent creature now as then. His angry eyes softened as they met hers and she felt that same overwhelming power she had recognized that first night.

She closed the door and leaned against it. "I—couldn't bear the thought of sleeping—in that strange bed tonight—alone," she stammered slowly.

Sensing the same mystic feeling of yesteryear, he smiled and moved toward her. "Take off your clothes," he said softly.

"I—I beg your pardon."

"You are dripping on my carpet." The smile belied the sardonic bite of his words.

"Oh, Jamie." She threw herself into his arms. He held her tightly, burying his face in her disheveled hair, breathing deeply of its warmth and fragrance.

"Katy," he whispered. "Is it really you?"

"Aye, love."

"God, how I have longed for you to be here with me."

"I was afraid to come. Afraid you didn't want me."

"And I knew you did not want me after the way I treated you. I was haunted by the torment of the whole ghastly episode of the uprising. It seemed as if I were being compelled to hurt you. My whole world was collapsing around me and I was sure that everything that was mine would be destroyed—even your love for me."

"Oh, Jamie, I thought you despised me."

He caressed her lovingly. "God, what a fool I am. Every breath I breathe sighs your name. Everything that is beautiful becomes your lovely face. Katy, don't ever leave me," he whispered huskily.

"Oh, Jamie, Jamie . . . I love you so."

She melted against him as his arms enfolded her.

That night as they lay abed, Katy snuggled closer and sighed, "It's almost as it was at first."

"Well," he told her slowly, "not quite. I seem to remember a quite unwilling maiden that night. One with very sharp claws." His hand went to his cheek as he smiled down at her crookedly.

She buried her face against his furry chest. Even the man-scent which invaded her nostrils brought her pleasure. The feel of his hardened arm pressing into her tender flesh as he pulled her closer set her pulse to pounding. She raised her face to his and he covered her lips with a gentle pressure.

"Did you have the same feelings you had when we first met, as I did?"

"Lord, yes. Like someone hit me in the gut."

She laughed nervously. "I was frightened to death and when I saw you standing there . . . it was just like . . . all over again." She laughed again, this time with mirth. "Then when you told me to take off my clothes, I couldn't believe my ears. I didn't think you would remember."

"Do you think I could ever forget our first meeting?" He kissed her gently. "Do you believe in new beginnings, Katy?"

"I believe in anything and everything in which you want me to believe."

"Then believe this—I love you. More than anything else in the world, I love you. I have no more worlds to conquer or points to prove. When my father died I knew that for the first time in my life I was free. Free to be my own man. Free for the first time to do what I wanted to do. At last, I am free to find out just who James Richard Bartlett really is. I can love and live my own life. But most of all, I can love and have you without the nagging doubt of whether you are all mine or not." His eyes engulfed her. She saw no sign of anger in his dark gaze, nor of any disturbance at all. They reminded her of dark liquid pools. The scowl had disappeared, this time for good, she was certain. The beloved face bending over her was gentle and unguarded as she saw him in sleep.

"Oh, Jamie, there should never have been any doubts in either one of us. So much time has been wasted between us. I have always been yours. I always will be."

His mouth covered hers, seeking, finding, claiming, demanding—fulfillment.